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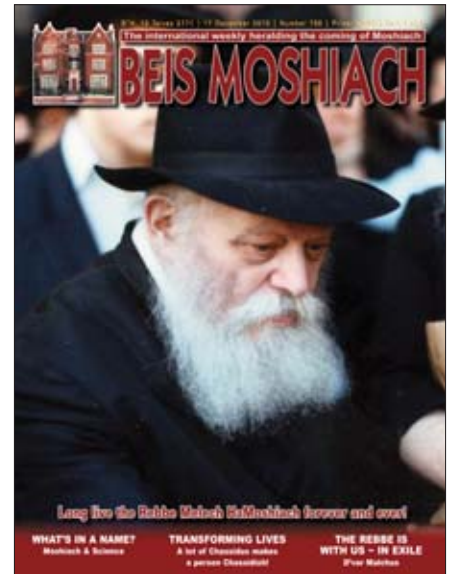
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THE REBBE IS WITH US – IN EXILE

Translated by Boruch Merkur

The reason for the Rebbe remaining with us in exile is so there will be the effect of “Chazak, Chazak, V’Nis’chazek” – that Jews in the doubled and redoubled darkness of the generation of the Heels of Moshiach should be strengthened and further strengthened, and again strengthened, by the fact that “Yosef” with his bones, including the (inner meaning of bones, which is his) essence – the essence (and being) of Yosef, as well as his flesh, etc. – is together with us in exile!

HOW ARE WE STRENGTHENED BY “AND YOSEF DIED”?!

As explained earlier, the proclamation “Chazak, Chazak, V’Nis’chazek,” said upon completing each of the five books of the Torah, provides strength derived from (and applied to) the content of the book’s final verse (said immediately prior to “Chazak, etc.”). Applying this principle to the Book of B’Reishis, however, yields a great

quandary:

The last verse in the Book of B’Reishis is about the death of Yosef: “And Yosef died at the age of one hundred and ten years, and they embalmed him and they placed him in a coffin in Egypt.”

A strong difficulty arises: How are we strengthened (“Chazak, Chazak, V’Nis’chazek”) 1) by the words “Yosef died,” and 2) by the fact that he remained “in Egypt,” “the nakedness of the earth”?

Indeed, being in Egypt constitutes an incredible descent, to the point that Yaakov pleaded, “Please don’t bury me in Egypt... bear my body out of Egypt.” Yaakov did not wish to have his body remain buried there even for a short while. Yet 3) the body of Yosef remained there – not in a transient manner but – in a permanent manner, for a period that lasted generations.

It is noteworthy that, simply speaking, the words “and they embalmed him (and they placed him in a coffin)” come to inform us that his body (including his flesh, etc.) would remain entirely whole (protecting it from gnats and worms). Moreover, his body was placed in “a coffin,” strongly emphasizing the notion that his burial was designed for permanence. It was only after many years that Yosef’s request, “take my bones out of this [land],” was fulfilled. And then, only his “bones” are mentioned, without [mention of] his flesh, etc. (whereas in Egypt “they embalmed him, etc.” – bones as well as flesh, etc.).

It would make sense were the portion to end with the penultimate verse, the oath that Yosef took, “The L-rd will surely visit you and take you up from this land [and take you] to the

land which He promised to Avrohom, Yitzchok, and Yaakov, etc., and take my bones up from it.” It would be (somewhat) understood how this can be a source of strengthening, for it speaks about the assurance that the Jewish people would eventually be taken out of exile and the bones of Yosef would also be brought out. However, the final verse, “And Yosef died...and they embalmed him and they placed him in a coffin in Egypt,” has the exact opposite effect. Namely, notwithstanding the vow that “The L-rd will surely visit you...and take my bones up from it,” in the interim what would take place was, “And Yosef died...and they embalmed him and they placed him in a coffin in Egypt”!

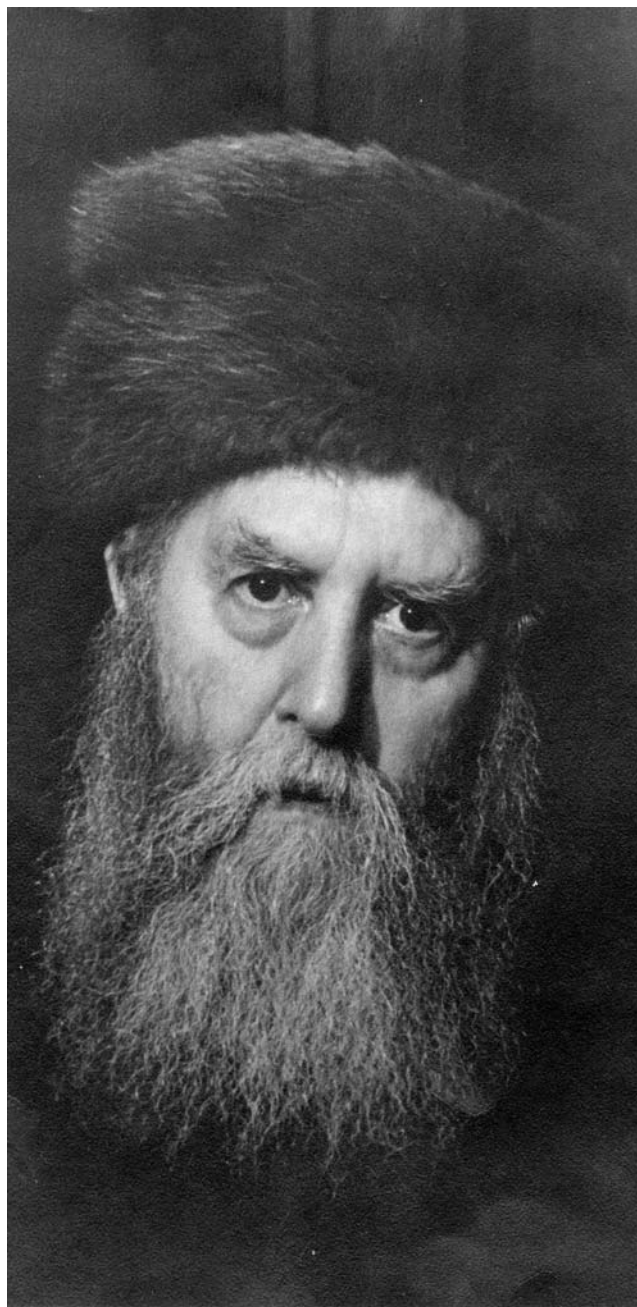
EQUIPPED TO WITHSTAND THE TRIBULATIONS OF EXILE

We may assert the following explanation, as is understood also by the most simple person, “a five-year-old who learns Scripture” and the like:

It is simply understood (even to a young child) that prior to the Jewish people’s exile they had to be strengthened and properly equipped in order to withstand the tribulations of exile, remaining firm in their faith and in their Torah study, their fulfillment of Mitzvos and their general service of G-d.

Thus, it is understood that before coming to [the opening

words of the Book of Shmos] “And these are the names of the Children of Yisroel who came to Egypt” – a verse that describes the principal descent and exile to



Egypt – a special strengthening and bestowing of power is needed in order to proceed.

Indeed, the general content of the Book of B'Reishis (which

precedes the Book of Shmos) – “The Book of the Upright...that is, the Book of Avrohom, Yitzchok, and Yaakov (and the Tribes), who are called ‘upright’” – is an account of the Divine service of the Patriarchs, as a preparation and provider of strength for the service of their descendants, as our Sages say, “The deeds of the fathers are a sign for the children.” And the purpose of this invigoration is primarily intended for when the children would descend into exile. Another main theme of the Book of B'Reishis pertains to the promises G-d made to the Patriarchs (especially in the Covenant of the Parts) – that the Jewish people will go out of exile and reach an even greater height [than they had had prior to their descent]: “And thereafter they will go out with a great hoard of possessions.”

And as the Book of B'Reishis develops, the greater is the strengthening and the power it supplies to the Jews who would later be in exile in Egypt. At the end of Chumash B'Reishis, Parshas VaYechi, a milestone is reached. Namely, it speaks there about the blessing Yaakov bestows upon the Tribes, a blessing and drawing down of influence and power to each of the Tribes individually and to all of them as a group.

Then, as we come to the conclusion of the portion, Yosef strengthens the Jewish people

We don't have any reason to be disheartened by exile; we should stand strong and firm, withstanding the tribulations and concealments of exile.

further, explicitly, and with even more conviction: "The L-rd will surely visit you and take you up from this land [and take you] to the land which He promised to Avrohom, Yitzchok, and Yaakov, etc." As a result, the Jewish people would not collapse under the yoke of exile.

Then, the portion concludes with (the final verse), "And Yosef died...and they embalmed him and they placed him in a coffin in Egypt," a powerful means of strengthening and giving power to the Jews in exile:

In addition to the benefit of "The deeds of the fathers are a sign for the children," and in addition to the promises of G-d to Avrohom, Yitzchok, and Yaakov, with the promise Yosef made to the Jewish people ("The L-rd will surely visit you, etc.") – the Jews, within the condition of exile itself, had something real with them that strengthened them and assisted them to withstand the doubled and redoubled darkness.

THE PRESENCE OF YOSEF IN EXILE

That is, the presence of Yosef, wholly with them, together, in exile in Egypt. And not only in a transient manner but in a manner that was permanent and whole, with his bones and flesh, etc. – "they embalmed him, etc." and "placed him in a coffin in Egypt." Yosef's presence strengthened the Jewish people, enabling them to survive exile. In fact, they had the power to rule over exile, following the example of and with

the power of Yosef, regarding whom it is said "besides you, no one may lift his hand or his foot in the entire land of Egypt." And through exile they would reach a loftier height ("and take you up") and actually go up from Egypt into the Land of Yisroel.

Thus, this circumstance ("and they placed him in a coffin in Egypt" [concluding the Book of B'Reishis]) gives rise to and reveals the inner intent of the subsequent verse ([the opening words of the Book of Shmos] "And these are the names of the Children of Yisroel who came into Egypt"), "pertaining to the redemption of the Jewish people they [i.e., "the names of the Children of Yisroel who came into Egypt"] are mentioned here," the redemption, which comes about through the descent. [...]

If these matters are applicable to all generations of exile, how much more do they apply to this generation, the generation of the Heels of Moshiach [at the end of the exile and the very threshold of redemption]. Given the descent of each successive generation (regarding the diminishment in the understanding and comprehension of Torah, etc.), G-d, in His great benevolence, has issued overt instructions to the Jewish people, etc. (in addition to the fact that a Jew must personally strive to find allusions in everything with regard to his Divine service):

"Yosef" is the (first) name of the Rebbe Rayatz, the leader of our generation (as Yosef was the

leader of his generation), and the service of the leader of our generation resembles the service of Yosef HaTzaddik in several respects [...]

WE DON'T HAVE TO BE DISHEARTENED BY EXILE

The fact is that the holy resting place of the Rebbe Rayatz (the Yosef of our generation) is together with us in exile, in the "lower hemisphere" (America) – "and they placed him in a coffin in Egypt"!

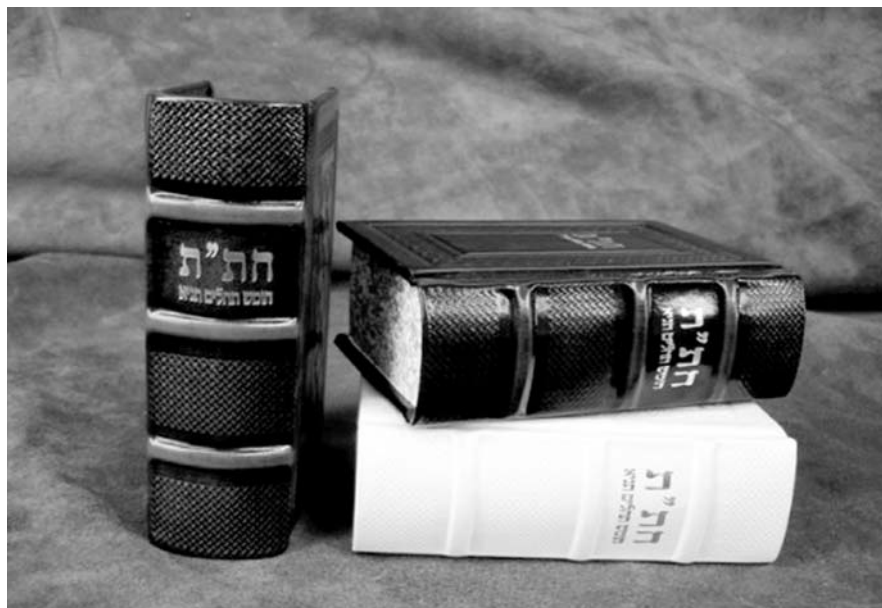
The reason for the Rebbe Rayatz remaining with us in exile is so there will be the effect of "*Chazak, Chazak, V'Nis'chazek*" – that Jews in the doubled and redoubled darkness of the generation of the Heels of Moshiach should be strengthened and further strengthened, and again strengthened, by the fact that "Yosef" with his bones, including the (inner meaning of bones, which is his) essence – the essence (and being) of Yosef, as well as his flesh, etc. – is together with us in exile!

Therefore we don't have any reason to be disheartened by exile; we should stand strong and firm, withstanding the tribulations and concealments of exile, which can be an obstacle to the study of Torah and the fulfillment of Mitzvos. This especially includes the service and approach of "the straight path which he guided us upon, of his paths...and ways" of the "Yosef" of our generation. Namely, the service of disseminating Torah and Judaism, and spreading the wellsprings outward, reaching even the furthest possible outer limit. And in this manner we show that "his progeny is alive" and of consequence "he too is alive."

Seifer HaSichos 5747, Shabbos Parshas VaYechi, pg. 251 ff.

A SURVIVOR, THE CHILD OF SURVIVORS

By Ofra Badosa



It was Shabbos in a shul in a Lubavitcher community in the north of Israel. The davening was over and all the ladies gathered round the table, talking, sharing, and enjoying one another's company. Right before the ladies began to leave, someone on the side of the room said, "I want to tell you my story." When I turned around I saw Etty, a newcomer who had been regularly attending the farbrengens, shiurim, and the davening on Shabbos. I had never had an extended conversation

with her but the way she made that statement made me want to drop everything else and listen to her.

Etty's voice trembled as she began to speak:

It's important for me to tell you my story in order to publicize the miracle. I know that this is what the Rebbe wants, which is why I'm doing this. I will tell you a little about myself so you will understand where this story begins. In my teens I was preoccupied with the search for meaning. I knew there had to be

something beyond superficial reality, beyond the material. I felt this deeply but I did not have the tools with which to define it. I had a strong need to search, which was accompanied by a constant sense of unease.

I come from a home that is very unobservant. My parents were both in Auschwitz and they met in the DP camps. In our home, G-d was constantly in the dock. The question of where was He when their entire families were murdered, was always hovering in our home. My mother, in particular, had problems with faith and my father, whom I so admired, did not talk about these matters. You can understand that coming from a house like this, going to a shiur and getting close to G-d was not possible.

When I was 24 I was divorced and was left alone with my two children. It was a difficult time and I had so many questions. I met a girl who was starting the t'shuva process and she invited me to attend shiurim that took place in the home of Rabbi Yitzchok Ginsburgh. At these shiurim I "found myself" and felt very connected, but this did not lead me to doing t'shuva.

For many years I lived here in the city but I had no connection with Chabad. It was just 14 years ago that I walked into the Chabad store to inquire about something. Avrohom welcomed me and helped me out and I began to frequent the store to check mezuzos, to empty pushkas, and to buy a gift sometimes. Before a holiday I would be informed about timely matters such as *Kaparos* before Yom Kippur and *matanos la'evyonim* before Purim.

You know Avrohom. Each time I met him was a treat for me. He always has a good word to say or something to teach me. He was a very significant person in my life even before I really got to know him.

Through him I saw unconditional giving to every person; it made no difference where he came from.

Whenever I went in there, I felt good. He never asked me questions and he would answer whatever I asked and gave advice, but he never pried. My connection with Chabad and with Avrohom was on a very low simmer for years.

Four years ago, I began bleeding. I went to a doctor who said it was a minor problem and nothing to worry about. But I felt that his diagnosis was wrong. Something inside me knew that I had to check this out further. I went to a private clinic for tests.

After a week, the doctor called me and said, "Mrs. Levitan, I have good news and bad news. The bad news is that you have a malignant tumor. The good news is that it is localized, has not metastasized, and you have a very good chance of treating it. You came in time, but you have to hurry."

It's hard to convey the feelings one has after being told such news. It's a feeling of someone standing over you with an ax, about to behead you. It's a challenge to survival at the most basic level which demands you overcome all feelings of confusion and fear. At all costs, you have to muster your physical and emotional strength to rid yourself of this cursed disease, to save yourself. The only thing that interested me at that moment was that this horrible thing be removed from my body; I didn't care how.

I don't even know why one of the first people I called was Avrohom. He picked up after a few rings and I said, "Hello Avrohom. I don't know if you remember me. I come to the store now and then." Then I began to cry, "They just told me that I have a tumor and I don't know what to do..."

Avrohom was practical. "When is your operation?" I looked in my daily planner and said, "Wednesday,

June 28, at two o'clock."

"We are having a big farbrengen the night before and we will mention your name and everyone will pray for you. I will give you the phone number of our rav who is the Rebbe's shliach here. You should speak to him."

I immediately called the rabbi. You know how hard it is to reach the rabbi on the cell phone; it's almost impossible. After two rings, though, he picked up. It didn't take long before I began crying again as I told him what happened. He calmed me and said he wanted to ask for a bracha for me from the Rebbe. Today I know that this meant that he wrote to the Rebbe through the Igros Kodesh.

After a few minutes he came back to the phone and said I had nothing to worry about and that I had a bracha from the Rebbe. "The operation will go well and with G-d's help you will recover. What you need to do is read the Chitas every day."

"What?" I thought I hadn't heard him correctly. "What did you say?"

He patiently explained to me what Chitas is and about its special qualities. He said I should go to the store "and Avrohom will show you how to use it."

I went to the store and Avrohom recognized me. He gave me a Chitas and showed me precisely how to do the daily study. So that I wouldn't forget, he took a flyer about the farbrengen the day of the operation and wrote all the details on the back. I still have the paper because it's a reminder of the big miracle that happened to me.

I was so rattled that he had to explain it to me again and again until I understood. "Don't worry. When you get into it, you'll explain it to others," he reassured me.

I cannot tell you how powerful this learning of Chitas was for me. Although I didn't know what it was,

the Rebbe's bracha for a recovery hinged on it and so I latched onto it like Torah from Sinai. I knew that if I learned it every day, I would be cured. I was certain of this. Before I left the store, Avrohom looked at me and smiled and said, "You will see that everything will be fine and if you have any question or problem, don't hesitate to call."

I entered the hospital that week with the Chitas in my bag. It was my anchor. Every day I learned the shiurim. At first I read it very slowly in order to understand everything it said. I remember how after the operation, my mind was so unclear as I lay there in bed with the IV that I didn't even remember what day it was. I called Avrohom and asked him what I needed to learn. Day after day I faithfully studied the shiurim. I read the words as though this was the most important thing I read in my life and there was no other book like it. I can't explain it.

After a few days I left the hospital. Some time after that I was informed that the tumor had been entirely removed and that I did not need radiation or chemotherapy. I was ecstatic. I sat facing the doctor who had operated on me and he said that the positive results were very unusual and he had to consult with another doctor. I saw from the way he spoke that he himself didn't believe the operation had gone so smoothly. He picked up the phone and called the best oncologist in the country to give him the results of the operation. I felt as though I was experiencing another sentencing. Were those truly the results of the operation? Would I have to undergo further treatment?

The doctor read the results of the operation and I heard the senior doctor exclaim, "Tell your patient that she doesn't need any treatment at all. She's a healthy woman and everything is fine." As soon as I heard that, I felt overcome with feelings of joy and gratitude to

Hashem and the Rebbe. I began shouting, "I love you, Hashem!"

Although the doctor had given his opinion, my doctor said it would be a good idea to formally approach the other doctor with my paperwork. I went to the clinic and in the waiting room sat a row of patients whose appearance shook me up. You could see the disease on their faces. The very thought that I belonged to this segment of the population was unbearable. I submitted the paperwork to the secretary along with a note from the doctor who had operated on me.

A few minutes later an older man came out of the room wearing a white coat and a kippa and holding some papers. "Who is Esther?" he asked.

I got up and he gave me the papers. "Listen closely. You are a healthy woman. I don't know why you came here. Do you see the people sitting here? I have to treat these sick people. You are healthy! If you had this operation done in the United States, you wouldn't even have to do any follow-up." Those words echo in my ears till today. Whenever I go for a checkup I am scared, but then I hear the doctor's voice thundering, "You are healthy!"

After the operation I went to Avrohom to tell him about the miracle. He told me that I had to make a thanksgiving meal. A seminary for women had just opened in the Chabad house. Avrohom suggested that I make the meal there. Till today, the seminary is a

I feel that this is my second home, and maybe even my first home. From the first moment that I walked in I felt so much warmth and caring... There was no criticism and no demands; the way I am is fine.

home for me and I relish the warmth of the shiurim, farbrengens and heart-to-heart talks. My getting involved in religious observance comes from there.

If anyone would have told me five years ago that I would be going to shul on Shabbos and that I would be keeping what I keep today, I would have laughed in their faces. Through the shiurim and workshops that I attended I arrived at a place of peace; I have found myself. It didn't take long to go from there to davening at the Chabad house.

I will never forget the first time that I went to the Chabad house for davening on Shabbos. I saw all the children with their mothers and the whole scene of Shabbos with the niggunim, the davening, and the farbrengen. I closed my eyes and knew that I had come to my place. It sounded so familiar, as though I had been here before. Each time I returned home, all these things seemed odd to me, but here in the Chabad house everything felt right. I still didn't know what to say in the davening or when to stand and when to sit, but that didn't stop me from

feeling terrific. I didn't oppose anything and simply accepted whatever they told me to do.

When I began reading the words in the Siddur they spoke to me in a really profound way. Each word opened something in my heart. Boruch Hashem, I feel this connection every time anew. You should know that I really love this place and all of you. I feel that this is my second home, and maybe even my first home. From the first moment that I walked in I felt so much warmth and caring. You answered all my questions and you gave me the feeling that I am wanted here. There was no criticism and no demands; the way I am is fine.

Esther finished her story and she looked very emotional. Women slowly began going over to her. They hugged her and thank her for sharing and for the chizuk (moral strength) she gave. I was very moved by her and her story. There was so much to learn from her, so I wrote this down.

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‘WHAT WOULD LEVI HAVE TOLD ME TO DO?’

By Sholom Loebenstein

Levi had insight. I always knew I could speak to Levi when I needed to. I knew I could trust him. * Following the Shloshim of Rabbi Levi Deitsch O.B.M., Beis Moshiach continues with words of inspiration about the Rebbe's shliach to Tysons Corner, Virginia.

As a brother (In-Law) of Levi, I am speechless; I have no words to say. In addition to the question, “Why does Hashem take away the best of the best people in the world?” there are simply no words to describe the pain and anguish my family and I have now that Levi is no longer with us. We are left with no answers as to why this had to happen to Miriam, Chaya, Mendel, Mirel, Zalman and all Levi's family and friends together with the whole Klal Yisroel. May Hashem bless them with much strength, courage and happiness throughout their lives, they

should only hear good things from now on till the coming days of Moshiach speedily in our days.

All of those who were lucky to know, meet, or hear of Levi would know that Levi symbolized many things: always loving one another, being kind to every individual, helping everyone no matter who they are, always smiling, laughing, and doing Mivtzaim, always with a passion and with love for a fellow Jew. You were always able to see how he loved life by his acts of kindness. Levi would always give, give and give with a smile on his face.

I got to know Levi quite well, especially over the last three to four years, whether it was by our long serious and funny conversations over the phone or from my personal visits to Tyson's Corner over the last three years.

Levi was a warm, charming, funny guy to know and to be with, and over the last three years, while Levi was ill, so many people, not only America but the whole world would fly in to spend some time with Levi. And it wasn't only his friends but also respected rabbis, philanthropists, family, so on and so forth. They all knew that Levi was such an important person to everyone.

As a fifteen-year-old bachur, I always sought advice and help, whether it had to do with school, friends, learning, general behavior and most importantly more personal matters. Let me tell you Levi had insight. I always knew I could speak to Levi when I needed to. I knew I could trust him with all my personal matters. Levi was so-to-say my “Mashpia,” who I always listened to and loved very much.

Just two and a half months ago, while I was there for Tishrei,

I spent a lot of time with Levi walking to shul, at home, etc. One thing that sticks out of my mind is that one Shabbos Levi and I went on a long walk to shul, and Levi was not feeling very well at this time. Nevertheless, he was asking me as usual all about school, my teachers, what I was learning in and out of school, and with whom I have shiurim, what I'm doing next year, what I like and what I don't like, what I waste my time on and what I don't waste my time on, etc. Even though it was a very serious talk, Levi still made me laugh constantly, like he always did. As always, Levi finished off by saying in his loud deep voice "Sholom Menachem Mendel! Now that you told me everything, now tell me how you're going to improve all of that!"

I always thought I knew Levi until I read all the stories, poems, speeches, about Levi and his life on the blog. As well as you think you know Levi, there is always something you don't know about him and when you find what it is you just get even more and more inspired by him.

From sitting and reading all these wonderful and special stories about Levi on the blog no matter if it was his long time old friend or shluchim around the world, or respected elder rabbis, or men, women, and children in Levis Chabad house who wrote. It brings tears to my eyes to know what a great and special bother-in-law I have and love so dearly and so much.



This is a big loss for the whole Jewish community. Levi will be missed very much by everyone. But we pray that soon we will be dancing on the streets with Levi and all our loved ones and the whole Klal Yisroel with Moshiach on the way to Eretz Yisroel, may it be speedily in our days.

May we all take and use Levi's lessons to our everyday life and use them will just like Levi wants us to.

There is so much more I could

say. I could be here for days writing about Levi and his shlichus, funny, serious, cool, and loving stories.

Levi I miss you and love you so much and will always take your lessons into my hand and whenever I need to make a big decision I will think of you and think to myself "what would Levi have told me to do?"

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A WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

By Rabbi Aron Moss

I don't understand. Why do the good die young? I have lost a friend who was the best person I know. And I can think of plenty of not-so-good people who are living it up. Where is the justice? Can you make any sense of this upside down world?

To attempt a response, let me tell you a story.

A great debate once raged in heaven. It was over a most beautiful and precious new soul that G-d had created. The angels debated what should be done with this soul. One group of angels demanded that this soul remain in heaven. "She is too pure, too holy to face the ugliness of the lowly world," they said. "Who knows what will happen to her in a world of temptation and evil. This soul must stay with us here."

But the other group of angels said the exact opposite: "Indeed this soul glows with a unique Divine glow. But for that very reason she must go down to earth. For imagine the beauty and goodness this soul can bring to a dark world. What benefit is there in keeping such a soul in heaven? Let her descend

to earth and shine her light there."

And so they argued back and forth, each side unshakable in their view. Until it became clear that they could not resolve the issue themselves; they needed a Higher Authority. The case was

world needs such souls more than anything.

And this was G-d's response: "Indeed, it is sad to send such an immaculate soul into such a dark world. But this is My will. I only created darkness so souls like this one can transform the darkness into light. The whole purpose of Creation was that the lowly world be refined by the good deeds of mortal human beings. This cannot be achieved by souls in heaven. It can only be achieved through souls in bodies. And so even this most perfect and pure soul must descend to earth."

The first group of angels, who requested for the soul to remain in heaven, was disappointed. They couldn't fathom how such a spiritual being could be expected to survive such a physical world. G-d turned to them and said, "As for your request to keep this soul up here, I will grant it partially. Though she must leave us and go down to earth, it will not be long before she will return to us. Her sojourn on earth will be brief. Such a brilliant soul will not need



brought before G-d Almighty. The angels stated their arguments before the heavenly court. G-d listened to the two opinions – the first group of angels arguing that this unspoiled soul is too holy to be plunged into the lowly world, the second countering that the

I don't understand. Why do the good die young? I have lost a friend who was the best person I know. Where is the justice? Can you make any sense of this upside down world?

long to fulfill her mission. Soon she will be free to come back to heaven."

G-d then turned to the second group and asked, "Are you satisfied with that? Do you accept that this soul can only be on earth for a limited time?"

The angels replied, "Yes we

do. Every day that she is on earth is a blessing."

When a loved one passes away, we feel we have lost something precious. We are left with a gaping hole in our heart, and we often wonder why they

were taken away from us. But at the same time we can be grateful for the very fact that they were given to us in the first place. We are blessed to have such beautiful souls in our lives. The world is privileged to have such heavenly guests come down on earth. And even if it can only be for a short while, we will take whatever we can get.

In time, all souls will be reunited. In the meantime, let us be thankful for the gift of every day.

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ב"ה

TRANSFORMING LIVES WITH CHASSIDUS

By Rabbi Yaakov Shmuelewitz
Shliach, Beit Shaan

R' Mendel Futerfas says, just as it is clear to you that a lot of mashke makes a person drunk and a lot of money makes a person crazy, it should be equally clear to you that a lot of Chassidus makes a person Chassidish. Chassidus changes reality!



In the HaYom Yom (13 Kislev) the Rebbe quotes a saying from the Rebbe Rayatz in the name of the Rebbe Rashab that “Chassidus changes the reality and reveals the essence.” In practical terms, the Rebbe Rashab is telling us that when we learn Chassidus it gives us the strength and the ability to change our reality (for the good) and to reveal the true essence of the neshama within us.

The mashpia R' Mendel Futerfas a”h added: There are three things in the world that definitely affect and change a person: *mashke* makes him drunk; money makes him crazy; and learning Chassidus makes him

refined and Chassidic. If you saw someone who drank but is not drunk, he obviously did not drink enough. When he drinks some more, he will become drunk. If you see someone who has a lot of money and is not crazy, he obviously does not really have enough money. Give him more and more and ultimately, it will make him crazy. If you saw someone who learned Chassidus and he is still not Chassidish, it's because he didn't learn enough yet. Give him more and more Chassidus and ultimately he will become *eideler* (more refined) and Chassidish.

Why did R' Mendel have to

give three examples of things that definitely have an effect when his sole intention is to teach us that Chassidus has an effect? I think it's because there are some people to whom mashke is close to their heart and there are people to whom money is close to their heart. R' Mendel comes and tells them, just as it is clear to you that a lot of mashke makes a person drunk and a lot of money makes a person crazy, it should be just as clear to you that a lot of Chassidus makes a person Chassidish. Chassidus changes reality.



Rabbi Yossi Daniel farbrenging with students at the new yeshiva in Tzfas

positive result, whether they agree to have their mezuzos checked, start a shiur, or begin visiting a shul, etc. Just as an example, R' Steinberger told me about a person in his neighborhood, a lecturer in a business school whose entire life changed thanks to learning Chassidus. He first met Aharon Cohen on Chanuka four years ago. R' Steinberger had several menorahs, a bottle of mashke, and some Chanuka brochures. He chose a multiple-story building, went up the steps, and knocked at every door. When he knocked at Mr. Cohen's door, he could see that there was a menorah already lit inside. So he said, "Chag sameiach, I see that you already lit the menorah, so I came to say l'chaim with you in honor of Chanuka." They sat down and began talking.

R' Steinberger told Mr. Cohen about his shul which combines t'filla and the study of Chassidus. Mr. Cohen came to try it out and liked it. He related to the Chassidic ideas and adopted a nice practice. Every Shabbos he listens to R' Steinberger's shiurim and then on Sunday, when he goes to teach, he starts the week's talks with his students with a brief summary of all the ideas he heard in shul that Shabbos. Every Thursday he has a shiur in Chassidus for the staff of lecturers.

R' Steinberger is supposed to give the shiur, but on the occasions when he can't make it, one of the lecturers steps up and displays his ability at giving a Chassidus shiur. One time, R' Steinberger showed up a little late and he saw that the shiur had begun. The dean of the college and some other lecturers were listening to an in-depth shiur in Shaar Ha'Yichud V'Ha'Emuna given by one of the staff members. R' Steinberger asked in surprise, "Where do you know this from?" The teacher (from Yerushalayim)

A TRANSFORMATION, EVERYWHERE AND FOR EVERYONE

At first, one might think that someone who wants to find examples in the world of how Chassidus changed reality should look for them in yeshivos Tomchei T'mimim or in shuls of Anash and of *ovdim* (those who toil in prayer and self-correction). That might be correct, but what is certain is that even among the Rebbe's shluchim, are thousands of cases where the essence of a regular Jew was revealed as a result of learning and living Chassidus. Here are some examples.

Rabbi Mendy Steinberger, shliach in the Kinyon neighborhood of Cholon, does tremendous work with the power of Torah and the study of Chassidus, and he has "proof" that Chassidus is effective. Despite the fact – or is it because – he has a shul with 150 people who hear shiurim and Chassidic ideas from him every Shabbos, he is constantly looking for new audiences and more Jews to be mekarev to Chassidus. One of the ways he does this is through making house calls.

From experience he learned that it makes no difference what "excuse" you use to get in the door; in the end you will always get some

LEARNING CHASSIDUS IN A CAVE

Ronen Amit is an interesting guy. He's a Lubavitcher who wears a knitted yarmulka who loves Chassidus. I met him on a plane on the way to the Kinus HaShluchim. He made a presentation to the shluchim on how to produce a professional event from beginning to end – concept to execution – while instilling Geula ideas throughout.

Ronen told me that on his journey to Chassidus he initiated a shiur in Chassidus that was given by Rabbi Shaul Akselrod, shliach in Givat Olga. The shiurim took place in a cave and Ronen invited friends, took care of refreshments, and arranged the carpets and seating cushions so it would be comfortable. Ronen was greatly impacted by the Chassidic ideas he learned and while sharpening his skills in arranging events, he also improved in his knowledge of Chassidus and his *hiskashrus* to the Rebbe. He arranged a bar mitzva celebration for a Russian billionaire and produced a documentary film on the family's roots in Russia to the tune of half a million dollars! Ronen lives in Kfar Chaim and his home is a Chassidic lighthouse for the entire area.

At a certain point, he adopted a boy from Russia who made aliya with the Naaleh program, without his parents. The first week following his bar mitzva, the boy went to his adopted father and pointed at the big picture hanging on the wall and said, "You see what kind of hat the Rebbe has? That's the kind of hat I want." Ronen was pleased with the boy's sentiment and he gave him money and sent him to a hat store in Yerushalayim. Something went wrong there (maybe there was no picture of the Rebbe?) and the boy came back with a round hat, the kind worn by other Chassidic groups. Ronen sent him back to the store with a picture of the Rebbe to show the hat seller what he wanted.

The boy chose to attend a Chabad yeshiva and eventually married and has a Chassidic home. He writes *t'fillin* and *mezuzos* and in his free time he beautifully illustrates *ketubos* (marriage documents) and other items, which his appreciative customers pay for handsomely.

said he has a regular shiur with Rabbi Zilberstrom in which they learn Tanya and other Chassidic works together and have been doing so for years. They recently finished the entire *hemshech* of 5666.

A TREMENDOUS THIRST FOR CHASSIDUS

Rabbi Nissan Nachshon, shliach in Efrat, also has some examples of people for whom Chassidus was transformative:

Dovid is a nice guy. He finished his army service and works for a security firm in Efrat. He recently went on a tour of India and the Far

East. He came across a Chabad house, heard some ideas of Chassidus, and nothing was ever the same again. He returned to Efrat and went to the local Chabad house, glanced at the bookshelves and asked R' Nachshon, "I'd like the key to the Chabad house so that as soon as I finish work I can come here and learn Chassidus."

He has been going every day and uses every free moment to learn Chassidus, and to attend shiurim and the davening.

CHITAS ON A CANOE TRIP

Rabbi Shmuel Reinitz, shliach

in Beit Shaan, adds some examples of his own. R' Reinitz had been on *shlichus* in Thailand for a year. Plenty of people who walked into the Chabad house "just for a coffee" were captivated by the teachings of Chassidus and today are Chassidim, rabbanim, and shluchim themselves.

For example, Rabbi Erez Lifschitz, shliach in Maaleh Adumim, gives about thirty short shiurim every day in Chassidus to working men and owners of businesses. Erez had been on an extended trip to Thailand when he suddenly found out that his grandfather in Israel had died. He went to the Chabad house to find out what he ought to do. The bachurim-shluchim had him join a shiur and Rabbi Nechemia Wilhelm gave him a Chitas as a gift. It is quite possible that R' Wilhelm doesn't even know what a tremendous change that Chitas brought about.

Erez continued his tour and one day, in the middle of a canoe trip somewhere in Thailand, he remembered that he had a Chitas with him. He took it out and began reading in the different sections. He admits that he did not understand much of it, not of the Chumash nor of the Tanya, but it was because of this that he was drawn to learn more. He returned to the Chabad house and stayed there for a month. Then he went to the yeshiva in Ramat Aviv. He recently announced the opening of an Evening Kollel in Maaleh Adumim, for the study of Chassidus. And all he had done was walk in and ask what to do since his grandfather had died ...

FROM BACKPACKER TO FOUNDER OF A NEW YESHIVA

Rabbi Shimi Goldstein, shliach in Pushkar, India, maintains that

whenever a Jew becomes a baal t'shuva through a Chabad house, it's only because of Chassidus. As an example he reminds me of Nadav Cohen who went to Pushkar eight years ago and today is a rav himself, a mashpia and teacher of Chassidus in Ascent in Tzfas.

When Nadav Cohen first came to the Chabad house in Pushkar, he was the exact opposite of anything that religion and Chassidus espouses. R' Shimi remembers that even when Nadav began studying Chassidus, he refused to learn the Rebbe's sichos about shleimus ha'arezt because of his Leftist views.

"Don't show that to me now," he asked. But days went by, and Nadav continued to delve into the study of Chassidus. "One day," relates Nadav, "I walked into the

Chabad house and saw two bachurim sitting and learning *hemshech* 5666. I listened to a few lines and was very excited. They were learning about levels of souls and angels and I said to myself: 'See what amazing things there are in the world and you are busy with nonsense.' I learned more Chassidus, listened to the videos of the Rebbe, and I became a Chassid."

I met R' Nadav at the Kinus HaShluchim and he had great news. "We are opening a yeshiva in Tzfas for baalei t'shuva, something new. There's nothing else like it in the country. Unlike other yeshivos in which there are regular classes and a curriculum, which someone new to this might not go for, our yeshiva will be like the Chabad house in Pushkar and

other places in India. We welcome everyone as they are and the learning is not only out of s'farim but also through conversations, sometimes into the night. Whoever loved the Chabad houses in the East can continue in that kind of atmosphere here."

The yeshiva was opened in collaboration with Rabbi Y. Y. Wilschansky, Rosh of the Chabad Yeshiva in Tzfas, and with the staff of Ascent including Rabbi Yossi Daniel who also came to the Rebbe and Chassidus at Shimi's Chabad house in India thanks to shiurim in Chassidus and Tanya.

Nadav and Yossi found their way to the Rebbe and Chassidus through the special Chabad houses in the East and they have adopted that style for themselves, and for their outreach activities.



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GEULA: WHAT WE AWAIT!

By Rabbi Gershon Avtzon

The Torah is eternal, and all changes that will occur in the times of Moshiach are in the framework of the Torah the way we know it now. * Part 3

Dear Reader sh'yichyeh:

In our previous article, we discussed – briefly – the feast that Hashem is preparing for Klal Yisroel in the times of Moshiach. We were left wondering:

What are some of the details of the feast?

The Location: In Gan Eden.

One may ask, how can physical human beings be in Gan Eden? The Lubavitcher Rebbe, in the sicha of 15 Av, 5743, explains the Gemara (end of Gemara Taanis) that when Moshiach comes, Hashem will make a dance with Tzaddikim in Gan Eden. Originally Adam and Chava were in Gan Eden. When they sinned, they were thrown out. Being that all impurity will be removed in Geula, we will be allowed to return.

The Menu:

1) The meat of the Shor HaBar slaughtered by the fins of the great

Leviasan. As the Midrash (VaYikra Rabba 13) describes:

There will be a great war in the future between the Shor HaBar (the wild mountain ox) and the Leviasan (Leviathan), two very formidable creatures, where the Leviasan slaughters the Shor HaBar with its fins (S'napir).

".....How will they be slaughtered? B'heimos (the Shor HaBar) will, with its horns, pull Leviasan down and rend it, and Leviasan will, with its fins, pull B'heimos down and pierce it through....."

2) The fish if the female Leviasan (see Rashi to B'Reishis 1:21)

3) Special wine known as the "Yayin HaMeshumar – The watched wine" (Brachos 34b)

4) Fruits of Gan Eden - especially from the original "Tree of Life" (Midrash Shmos 25)

5) The Manna from heaven (Rama MiPanu – "Maamer



Shabbas Hashem" Volume 2).
Details about the Bentching:

Who will lead the Bentching?

The Gemara (P'sachim 119b) describes: The Holy One, blessed be He, will make a great banquet for the righteous on the day He manifests [yigmol] His love to the seed of Isaac.

After they have eaten and drunk, the cup of Grace will be offered to our father Abraham, that he should recite Grace, but he will answer them, "I cannot say Grace because Ishmael issued from me." Then Isaac will be asked, "Take it and say Grace." "I cannot say Grace," he will reply, "because Esau issued from me." Then Jacob will be asked: "Take it and say Grace." "I cannot say Grace," he will reply, "because I married two sisters during [both] their lifetimes, whereas the Torah was destined to forbid them to me." Then Moses will be asked, "Take it and say Grace." "I cannot say Grace, because I was not privileged to enter Eretz Yisroel either in life or in death."

Then Joshua will be asked: "Take it and say Grace." "I cannot say Grace," he will reply, "because I was not privileged to have a son," for it is written, "Joshua the son of

Nun, Nun his son, Joshua his son.” Then David will be asked: “Take it and say Grace.” “I will say Grace, and it is fitting for me to say Grace,” he will reply, as it is said, “I will lift up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.”

[From many commentaries (Tzemach Tzedek – Ohr HaTorah Mikeitz page 682, Sichos VaYishlach and VaYechi 5752) it seems that when the Gemara says David, it refers to “David Malka Meshichoi” – Moshiach Tzidkeinu.]

How big will the cup of Bentshing be?

The Gemara (Yuma 76b) describes: The cup of David will hold 221 *Lug* of wine! (That’s about 20 gallons)

From the above it seems that one may eat meat – “Shor HaBar” – that was slaughtered by fins of a fish – “Leviasan”. This seems to contradict a Mishna (Chullin) that says that one is forbidden to slaughter an animal with fins?! How could the righteous eat this seemingly non-kosher meat?

In truth, the Midrash itself asks this question and answers: When Moshiach comes, we will have a new Torah!

But this statement is even more puzzling, as it contradicts a basic tenet of Judaism, that the Torah is eternal! In the words of the Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah chapter 9):

It is clear and explicit in the Torah that it is [God’s] commandment, remaining forever without change, addition, or diminishment, as [Deuteronomy 13:1] states: “All these matters which I command to you, you shall be careful to perform. You may not add to it or diminish from it,” and [Deuteronomy 29:28] states: “What is revealed is for us and our children forever, to carry out all the

words of this Torah.” This teaches that we are commanded to fulfill all the Torah’s directives forever!

Some commentaries (Chiddushei HaRadal) explain the apparent contradiction by saying that being that this non-kosher slaughtering will only happen once, it is permissible. It is the category that Rambam describes (Yesodei HaTorah 9:3):

“When a prophet – who has already proven himself to be a prophet – instructs us to violate one of the mitzvos of the Torah or many mitzvos, whether they be of a severe or light nature, for a limited amount of time, it is a mitzvah to listen to him.”

The Sages of the early generation taught as part of the oral tradition: “If a prophet tells you to violate the precepts of the Torah as Elijah did on Mount Carmel, listen to him with regard to all things except the worship of false gods. This applies when his command is temporary in nature.”

But this does not seem to fit with the literal words of the Midrash, “New Torah,” which implies that it is a new law, not an application of a law that we know already.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains (Sicha, Shavuot 5751): All laws were given to Moshe at Mt. Sinai. Moshe gave us the tools by which we can extrapolate all the laws of the Oral Torah from the Written Torah. We must use our limited human intellect – with the tools given to us – to deduct and compare one law from and to each other, etc.

In truth, the law is that this type of slaughtering – with the fins of Leviasan by Hashem – is **permitted**, but in exile, we were not given the mental ability to find and derive the source of this law; therefore it is forbidden. Moshiach – who will be blessed with tremendous mental abilities – will

be able to teach and show us the source that proves that this type of slaughtering is permitted.

After the above, we are left with a question:

What other Halachos will change when Moshiach comes?

Beis Shammai vs. Beis Hillel

The many arguments that The “House of Shammai” (students of the famous sage Shammai) had with the “House of Hillel” (students of the famous sage Hillel) are well known. In most cases, the House of Shammai would rule a lot stricter than the House of Hillel. The reasoning was as follows:

Hillel’s approach was characterized by the attribute of Chesed, kindness, while Shammai’s was distinguished by the attribute of G’vura, might, which tends toward severity.

G’vura has an inward thrust, as reflected in our Sages’ statement: “Who is a gibor (mighty man)? One who conquers his inclination.” And according to the Kabbala, the attribute of G’vura is identified with din, judgment. A person who tends toward G’vura has unalterable standards of truth to which he personally endeavors to conform and which he desires to see reflected in the world at large. This is implied by the name Shammai, which relates to the Hebrew phrase: “*hasham orchosov*,” “He evaluates his ways,” i.e., he is constantly subjecting his conduct to rigorous introspection.

Chesed, by contrast, reflects an outward orientation. Others are one’s primary concern. A person motivated by chesed extends himself and gives, following the path Hillel outlines, “Loving peace and pursuing peace; loving the created beings and drawing them close to the Torah.” This approach also relates to Hillel’s name, which is associated with the phrase

“*behilo neiro*,” “When His candle shined forth.” For this approach emphasizes disseminating light, with the expectation that it will effortlessly cause darkness to shrink. And as light diffuses into wider peripheries, it attracts people and motivates them to change.

The Talmud (Eruvin 13b) describes that for three years, they fought that the practical Halacha should be like their own ruling. They each had a reason for their argument: The House of Shammai was known to be smarter and sharper than the House of Hillel, but the House of Hillel had the majority. In the end, a heavenly voice announced that we must follow the ruling of the Torah to always follow the majority (see Talmud Brachos 36b).

This will all change in the times of Moshiach. Our sages (Midrash Shmuel to Avos 5:19 and others) say that in the times of Moshiach, the Halacha will be like the house of Shammai. This does not contradict the eternity of Halacha; the reason we follow Hillel – even though Shammai was smarter – was because his opinion was in the majority. In the times of Moshiach – when everyone will become smarter and appreciate the wisdom of Shammai – the opinion of the House of Shammai will be the majority.

FASTING IN TIMES OF MOSHIACH

The Rambam writes (end of Hilchos Taanis):

“All these [commemorative] fasts will be nullified in the Messianic era and ultimately, they will be transformed into holidays and days of rejoicing and celebration, as [Zechariah 8:19] states: “Thus declares the Lord of Hosts, ‘The fast of the fourth [month], the fast of the fifth [month], the fast of the seventh

[month], and the fast of the tenth [month] will be [times of] happiness and celebration and festivals for the House of Judah. And they shall love truth and peace.”

[The above does not include the fast of Yom Kippur – and according to some commentaries, the Fast of Esther – which was not designed for mourning, rather for T’shuva.]

LEVITES WILL BECOME KOHANIM

The Arizal writes that the Leviim will become Kohanim.

When this is quoted in Tanya (chapter 50), the Alter Rebbe adds the words “The Levites **of today** will be Kohanim in the future”. The Lubavitcher Rebbe (in his notes to Lessons In Tanya) explains:

The Rebbe notes that the Alter Rebbe adds the words “of today” (“the Levites *of today* will become the Kohanim of the future”) in order to forestall the following question: The Torah was given “unto us and unto our children, forever” (*D’varim* 29:28). Rambam comments that we learn from this verse that one of the foremost principles of the Torah is that it remains immutable (*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*, ch. 9). How, then, can we possibly say that one of the laws of the Torah will (heaven forbid) be changed, so that the Levites become Kohanim, with all the changes in Torah law that such a transformation entails?

The Alter Rebbe therefore writes that this does not mean that those Levites born in the future will become Kohanim. Rather, it means that those Jews who are presently Levites will be born in the future into priestly families, thereby making them lawful *Kohanim*.

This, however, leads to another question: If this is the case, then

there is nothing novel about it; it goes without saying that any child born to a *Kohen* is himself a *Kohen*.

The answer to this, says the Rebbe, lies in the fact that Levites are born as such because their soul’s spiritual source and therefore their divine service – both in the Temple as well as now – is that of *G’vura*. So, too, with regard to Kohanim: their source is *Chesed*. Since, in the time after *Moshiach*’s coming, the service prompted by *G’vura* will surpass that of *Chesed*, those who today are Levites will be born into priestly families so as to attain their superior spiritual level.

THE “SAFEGUARDS” OF THE CHACHOMIM

There are many laws that were instituted to “protect” the laws of the Torah. For example, when Rosh Hashanah falls out on Shabbos, we don’t blow the Shofar. The reason is that the sages were afraid that a Jew who does not know how to blow the Shofar, will carry his Shofar to someone who can teach him or blow for him. This person would be transgressing the law that one is not allowed to carry an object for 4 cubits on Shabbos. When Moshiach comes – and everyone will be educated and sensitive to all spiritual matters – these “safeguards” will be annulled. (See Seifer Maamarim Meluket Vol. 1, page 428).

From the above it is clear that the Torah is eternal, and all changes that will occur in the times of Moshiach are in the framework of the Torah the way we know it now.

How does this fit with the saying of our sages (Talmud 61b) that “All Mitzvos will be nullified in the times of Moshiach”?

This we will explain IY”H in our next article.

JEWISH RENAISSANCE IN HOLLAND

Interview by Nosson Avrohom

Rabbi Vorst (pronounced Furst) has been on shlichus in Holland for nearly fifty years. Over the years, R' Vorst has made an enormous change among Dutch Jewry; with many hundreds of people transforming their way of life, Jewish awareness within the Jewish community of Holland has reached an all-time high.

For the past many months, the Netherlands has been in the world media, ever since the elections for Parliament in June in which the anti-Islam party of Geert Wilders scored its best-ever win with 24 seats. This party is outspokenly against Moslem immigration to their country, which has led many commentators to discuss and write about the change Holland has undergone. Wilders has recently been discussed once more in the media in light of his being accused of attacking the Moslem religion, incitement to hatred and discrimination against Moslem immigrants.

In any case, among old-time Dutch citizens as well as among many in the Jewish community, Wilders' popularity has soared. From a party of one legislator, his has blossomed into a movement which has gained 24 out of 150 seats in Parliament. Wilders is a staunch supporter of Israel, which he describes as the "West's first line of defense in its war against Islam." Wilders is under heavy security in fear that he will be murdered by terrorists.

"I don't understand politics," Rabbi Moshe Yitzchok Vorst told me, "but there is concern that today

they are against the Moslem minority and tomorrow they will be against the Jewish minority."

R' Vorst has been working in Holland on the Rebbe's shlichus for nearly 50 years. His father, R' Levi Vorst a"h, was a prominent rabbi in Holland before the outbreak of World War II and he picked up the pieces immediately after the Holocaust that destroyed most of Dutch Jewry. Only two years after becoming acquainted with Chassidus and becoming a Chassid, he was sent by the Rebbe to bring Chassidus to Holland. During the dozens of years since he returned to





Holland, he wrote and translated dozens of Jewish books and was mekarev many to Judaism. Some of them serve today as shluchim themselves in Holland.

From his residence in Amstelveen, a suburb near Amsterdam where many Jews live today, including quite a few Israelis, R' Vorst oversees everything going on in Holland.

R' Vorst was called upon to be the rav of the Ashkenazi shul, a shul where only a few Jews davened. In order for there to be a minyan, it was necessary to ask Jews who lived in other areas to walk a long way. "In

recent years, we have moved to a new building and the number of congregants continues to grow."

MIRACLES ESCAPING THE NAZIS

R' Vorst was born in Rotterdam in 1938. His father was rav of the city where thousands of Jews lived. World War II destroyed this beautiful community and many Jews were sent to concentration camps and perished. Some managed to hide, to change their names and clothing. The Vorst family, together with other Jewish families, was sent by the Nazis

and their collaborators to the Dutch concentration camp in Westerborg. From there, the Germans planned on sending them to extermination camps in Germany and Poland. At the last moment their lives were saved and they were sent to Bergen Belsen.

"In the book *Niggun B'Yagon* I describe everything that happened as I remember it, through the eyes of a child, only seven years old. The Germans decided to send us to a labor camp and not an extermination camp since my mother Tzipora Chana Hy"d had just given birth to my brother Boruch Nechemia. The war was starting to go badly for the Germans and many of them were captured by the Russians and British. So the Germans built camps in which they allowed the Jews to remain alive in the hopes that afterwards they would be able to negotiate prisoner exchanges. Miraculously, the Germans agreed that we, too, should be sent to that camp and that is how our lives were saved.

"My baby brother died just three weeks after he was born, though this did not change the Germans' minds and we were sent to the camp. One famous prisoner exchange happened when the British took captive dozens of German priests living in Israel and released them in exchange for Germany freeing many Jews from Bergen Belsen. The American army, who had joined the war against the Germans, caused them many losses and they began retreating from country after country in Europe. In order to erase any signs of the camps, the Germans destroyed them and they moved us into the heart of the conflagration.

"That is how we found ourselves in the midst of all the bombing. Many Jews who survived the camps were killed by shelling from the Allies. The ones who saved us were soldiers from the Red Army who brought us to displaced persons camps. On the trains there was no

The officer was furious and told him to come the next day with his beard in hand, otherwise, he would be shot. My father was ready to be moser nefesh for this. The next day he presented himself in the officer's room with his beard intact. Miraculously, he was left alive.

food or water and many people died, including my mother. I was too young to understand the enormity of the tragedy.

"As a young boy my parents are engraved in my memory as symbols of eternal faith. One time, an SS officer demanded that my father shave his beard with a razor. My father fearlessly said that the Torah forbids him from doing so. The officer was furious and told him to come the next day with his beard in hand, otherwise, he would be shot. My father was ready to be moser nefesh for this. The next day he presented himself in the officer's room with his beard intact. Miraculously, he was left alive. My father strengthened other Jews in their observance as well.

"In the camp we were in, many Jews died nearly every day. Illnesses, starvation and plagues were our lot and they felled many. Every morning there were people responsible for removing the bodies for mass burial outside the camp. My father would walk alone behind the wagon which was driven by German soldiers and would say chapter 91 of T'hilim as is customary. Only G-d knows from where he and a few other Jews – including R' Uri Yehuda Cohen [an amazing person and confidant of the Rebbe who carried out many secret missions and was one of the re-builders of Dutch Jewry after the war] – derived the strength to raise up a community from the dung-

heaps. Despite the destruction that they experienced and saw with their own eyes, they did not break and they built the foundation of the k'hillos of today.

"The Jewish "ship" was tossed about on a sea of boiling Jewish blood, with many Jews struggling to survive physically and many firmly focused on keeping their spiritual flame lit.

I'll never forget my mother in the women's barracks in Bergen Belsen collecting some rotten potato peels for Pesach and arranging them on the cover of a box as though they were the items on the seder plate. In a choked-up voice she wished the other women who had gathered round, "that we merit to have all the proper items on the plate next year and that we go free." That was my mother, even in the greatest darkness she knew how to bring out light.

"After the war, my father led the k'hilla which consisted of some broken families. He encouraged many of them to make aliya, as he saw no future for Jews in Holland."

FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH CHABAD

When we asked R' Vorst how he came to Chabad, he enumerated two main factors:

"The first and main reason is a strong attraction I had since childhood towards p'nimius (inner depth). I did not know what

Chassidus is and though I had heard Chassidic tales, I didn't make a connection between them. The one who exposed me to the fact that p'nimius is to be found in Chassidus was Professor Daniel Meyers, one of the first Chabad Chassidim in Holland. I have a bit of musical talent and he, who was our neighbor, gave me recordings of Chabad niggunim to listen to that he got from New York. I listened and could feel the warmth and depth.

"That was at the end of 5719/1959. Judaism in Holland after the Holocaust was very cold, without chayus and much simcha. In books we read a lot about fiery faith, about the warmth and feeling in Judaism, but the Jews of Holland were very broken. I wanted to see these nice ideas in the flesh. The relationship with R' Meyers exposed me to a wonderful world. That was my first exposure. Later on my sister Shifra married Rabbi Dovid Morosov, Hy"d. When I finished studying highway engineering in Amsterdam at the age of 23 and looked for a yeshiva, it was only natural for me to go to Kfar Chabad.

"My original plan was to make aliya. I didn't see a future for Judaism in Holland. Not long after I arrived in Eretz Yisroel, I went to learn under the mashpia, R' Shlomo Chaim Kesselman in the yeshiva in Lud. My friends were R' Moshe Slonim a"h and Benzion Lipsker a"h. I remember that I sat at a farbrengen with R' Kesselman and, although I didn't understand everything since he spoke in Yiddish, I was drawn by his seriousness. I felt that if there is truth in the world, it is to be found in Lubavitch. The niggunim really spoke to me. I felt that these were not superficial songs but they had depth, p'nimius.

"It took me a long time to internalize the idea of 'Rebbe.' At home I never heard of this concept. I remember that my father once said in a speech that on his visit to Eretz



Rabbi Vorst at a farbrengen with shluchim in Holland

Yisroel he saw Jews called Chassidim who enable other Jews to do the mitzvah of lulav. It made a great impression on him but in our home we did not speak about Chassidim or Rebbes.

"I arrived at yeshiva in Teves, 5721, and in Nissan I spent the break with my uncle in Ashdod. One day I saw a sign that announced that an American company would be building a port. Building highways was the profession I had learned and I went to the company's office. An appointment was made with the manager and he said that yes, they were looking for an engineer. When I left I was a bit confused. I had planned on learning in yeshiva for

half a year and then joining the army. Here I had learned for just two months and had found a job. What was I doing?

"Having spent two months in the yeshiva in Lud, I already knew about writing to the Rebbe. The bachurim there explained to me what a Rebbe is and why he is different than any other rabbi I knew. I had not received an answer to the first letter I had written earlier, perhaps now I should write about my doubts. I wrote and did not get an answer this time either. I consulted with Rabbi Kesselman. He suggested that I write again for perhaps my letter had been lost. He also suggested that I write "urgent" on it. Meanwhile I

asked the company for a postponement of my employ but received no answer. I went back to R' Kesselman and asked him what to do.

"In his great wisdom, he said that the Rebbe thinks I should continue learning in yeshiva. Why didn't the Rebbe answer? 'Because he wants you to reach this decision on your own.'

"I agreed with his assessment and wrote a third time, this time saying I was continuing in yeshiva. Two days later I received a response to my earlier letters in which the Rebbe said I should continue learning in yeshiva, at least another two years."

THE REBBE PICKS HOLLAND FOR SHLICHUS

Rabbi Vorst arrived in 770 for the first time on 17 Av, 1962. He had traveled by ship with a friend from yeshiva, R' Yitzchok Kagen a"h who translated the HaYom Yom.

"I learned in yeshiva for a short while and didn't know what to do next. Should I remain in Crown Heights, return to Israel, or maybe to Holland. I wrote to the Rebbe and did not get a reply. I wrote again and still no response.

"I asked R' Chadakov why I did not get a response. He said I should write a third time and if I still did not receive a response, he would go in and ask my question. This time the Rebbe responded that I should return to Holland and spread Judaism and Chassidus. I received this answer on 9 Elul. I wondered why the Rebbe had not responded right away, and then it clicked. The first letter that I had gotten from the Rebbe when I was in Israel, where the Rebbe told me to learn for two years in yeshiva, I had received on 9 Elul. It was only when two complete years had passed that the Rebbe responded about my future activities.

"On 28 Tishrei I had my first yechidus. My father had sent a letter to the Rebbe in which he asked him to send shluchim to Holland, but he received no reply. When my father heard that I was having yechidus, he asked me to ask why he had not received a reply, and I did so. The Rebbe looked at me with a smile and said: "I don't have anyone fitting for this who wants to do it ..."

"A year later, when the Rebbe sent me on shlichus to Holland, I recalled that yechidus and realized that back then the Rebbe had delineated my shlichus."

Even before he returned to Holland, a shidduch was suggested for him with the oldest daughter of

Rabbi Moshe Robinson. R' Robinson was moser nefesh for chadarim in Russia and after leaving Russia, he served as maggid shiur in the Chabad yeshiva in Brunoy.

"When I had yechidus on my birthday, I asked the Rebbe whether to look into shidduchim for I was 25 years old. The Rebbe told me not to think about it until the end of the yeshiva year or at least until after Shavuos. I was surprised by the wording, for if it was until the end of the year of learning, that would be next Tishrei, so why did he mention Shavuos?

"After I became engaged I found out that her parents had deliberated whether to send her for shidduchim for Shavuos or to wait until the Tishrei holidays. In the end they decided to send her for Shavuos. Every word of the Rebbe is precise. When she told this to me I finally understood the Rebbe's answer.

"Despite the hardship in moving to a foreign country, my wife agreed to go with me to Holland. At first I worked as a teacher and in other jobs. After about a year I received the rabbinic position in Amstelveen, a suburb of Amsterdam. There was a tiny community which had minyanim only on Shabbos morning. I asked various people to come and complete the minyan. It sometimes meant an hour's walk each way. Every Friday I stood at the public phone on the street corner and asked people to come and complete the minyan.

"The beginning was definitely hard. The Ashkenazic community which I led was tiny but today, with the Rebbe's brachos, it's changed completely. After fifteen years we built the first shul founded in the country after the Holocaust. It was an event that made waves not only within Jewish communities but also among the rest of the population of the country."

THE BEGINNING OF THE JEWISH RENAISSANCE

At the start of his shlichus, despite his deep Dutch roots, there were Jews who were frightened of him. A Chabad Chassid was appointed to be their rav, chazzan, and darshan – who knows what he'll say, and what changes he will make?

"Some communal activists were doubtful about whether my appointment was a good idea. They examined everything that I did under a magnifying glass. Few Jews came on Shabbos but for the first day of Rosh HaShana there was a large crowd. People from the entire area came and I had a golden opportunity to get up and talk about the holiday.

"Nu, what does a Chassid talk about on Rosh HaShana before the t'kios? He talks about the blowing of the shofar and how it is explained according to the maamarim of the Rebbeim. In order to explain to them what the 'inner voice' that comes forth from the heart is, I used the example of a son sent out of the house on a mission. Afterwards, when he returns and meets with his father, not a word needs to be said, not even a cry; just an 'inner voice.' Out of the corner of my eye I saw one of the askanim enjoying the analogy and the speech. Afterwards he told me that he had expelled his son from shul because he did not behave properly and afterwards, when his son returned they both hugged. I understood why he enjoyed my analogy.

"After a short time, the leaders of the community saw that I had no plans to change their routine and that what I wanted was to breathe new life into the community. I was careful about not quoting Chabad and the Rebbe all the time. Even if most of what I said was sourced in the Rebbe's sichos, I didn't make mention of it. You have to understand that the people of Holland had never been exposed to

Chabad before. Chassidus had not come there before the war and people were wary of anything new. Today it looks altogether different.

“In 5726/1966, I went to the summer camp Tikvaseinu, under the auspices of the community’s youth division, for the first time. They had the practice of having a soccer game between the kids and the counselors. Although I wasn’t a counselor, I decided to join the game on the counselors’ team. Hashem helped and I was the one who scored. A nine year old standing there was amazed. When he went home he asked his father whether all rabbis are also good athletes. That boy became a baal t’shuva and a rav himself.”

R’ Vorst has numerous stories. Here’s another one he recalled:

“For a long time I would go to Rotterdam to give shiurim to young people. On one trip I had car trouble. As I waited for the car to be fixed, I called the children and told them about the problem and asked them to start learning on their own in the meantime until I arrived. When I arrived I saw them talking animatedly. One of them told me that they had had a debate and in the end he realized for the first time that there is a Creator of the world. I realized that it was for this that I had been delayed. That boy became a baal t’shuva and has a frum family.”

HISTORY MADE IN HOLLAND: CHASSIDISHE CHINUCH

One of the main areas that R’ Vorst put his time and efforts into is chinuch. Together with R’ Daniel Meyers they opened a Chabad school in Amsterdam.

“One day the mashpia, R’ Mendel Futerfas, came to visit. He was my wife’s uncle. He saw one of my children riding a bicycle and as he rode, his yarmulke fell off, but he didn’t stop immediately to retrieve it. R’ Mendel was shaken up by this. A



Rabbi Vorst at a farbrengen with shluchim in Holland

man of action, he spoke to me and R’ Uri Cohen and said we must start a Talmud Torah.

“He told us that in the Soviet Union, Chassidim were moser nefesh for the chinuch of their children and though he understood the decision to avoid antagonizing the existing Jewish school by opening a Talmud Torah, this was a (spiritual) life and death matter. That very day R’ Cohen decided to start a Talmud Torah. Where? In the living room of his house. At first there were five children, two of my sons, one of R’ Meyers and two not from Anash.

“The beginning was hard and very complicated. People in the community spoke about us as though we had decided to make a split. Behind my back they said that maybe it was time to fire me but we didn’t cave in. Whoever was willing to listen was told about the difference between chinuch al taharas ha’kodesh and a general education. A year later another class was started for girls with only two students: my daughter and R’ Meyers’ daughter. As time went on, other people saw the advantage in a Chassidic school and we had to find a larger location because the living room was no longer large enough. R’ Meyers worked tirelessly so that the school

would get the necessary government permits. He received the Rebbe’s bracha for the entire process (in general, R’ Meyers was known as someone who received answers to every question he asked).

“He contacted a friend who had fought as a partisan in World War Two. That friend had a high government position and he arranged that our school would be official, with all the necessary permits. We also got our first building. After twenty years we built a spacious building and at the Chanukas HaBayis many distinguished people were present, including the sister of the queen, who was the guest of honor.”

R’ Vorst has in his resume dozens of educational projects:

“In one of the early years I put Jewish words to songs that all Dutch children know. Another thing that I did was produce a bilingual bentcher in Hebrew and Dutch. Until then the bentchers were either in Dutch or in Hebrew and many people were embarrassed to say they did not know Hebrew. They took Hebrew bentchers but couldn’t read them.”

R’ Vorst published booklets on all the Jewish holidays geared for children:

“Until we went on shlichus, the



A medal awarded to Rabbi Vorst in the name of the Queen of Holland, along with a letter signed by the queen in honor of his 65th birthday. In the letter, she describes Rabbi Vorst as “a Jew who brought Judaism back to life in the kingdom of Holland”.

Torah was hidden in shuls in thick books and children had no access to it. I broke things down in a clear way. Many families drew close to Jewish life because of these booklets and the songs, and now a second and third generation are learning them.

“Another thing I published was an abridged Siddur translated into Dutch. This also came about through my participation in the summer camp. Since most of the children could not read Hebrew, they would only daven some of Shacharis and then the counselors would let them out for a break, asking a few children to stay behind to complete the minyan for Krias ha’Torah and Musaf. When I saw this, I decided to make an abridged Siddur so the children could take part in Shacharis and even Musaf.

“Children would hear about Jewish concepts in camp but the parents did not always understand what they were talking about. For three years I wrote articles for the Amsterdam Jewish community’s publication in which I explained how to light Shabbos candles and how to make Kiddush, etc. A book was subsequently published as a

compilation of all these articles. It was only when it was grabbed up off the shelves that we realized how necessary this project was.

“When I began working as a chazzan in the shul, I would occasionally hear someone behind me asking where we were up to. There were old machzorim in the shul and many people found it hard to keep up and find the place. I decided to do something about this.

“I put my idea forth to the general committee of rabbanim in Holland and they welcomed it. The Rebbe also encouraged me to do it. Although I had no prior experience in translating the t’fillos on such a large scale, I took on this project and devoted much time to it. I arranged the Siddur in such a way that whoever entered the shul, even if they had never opened a Siddur, would be able to find where the chazzan was up to.”

COURT CASE

Chabad’s relationship with the Reform movement is no longer as fraught with tension as it once was. According to R’ Vorst, in recent years each group does its own thing. The

wars of the early years have died down. They learned to respect Chabad’s work and they don’t try to undermine them. That was not the case in earlier years, and there were many conflicts, some of which made their way to the Dutch Supreme Court.

“There was a Jew married to a non-Jew who did not undergo kosher conversion. When their oldest son was old enough they wanted him to attend Maimon, the Jewish school, but he was not accepted. One of the laws in the school’s charter states that only those recognized as Jews by the Vaad HaRabbanim of Holland can attend the school and since their son wasn’t Jewish, he could not attend. The father was very offended and decided to go to court. He said his son was as Jewish as his friends’ kids who were also Reform, and he wanted his son to get the same education as they did. His mistake was that the others were actually Jews.

“I published a booklet explaining the significance of being a Jew in halacha and Judaism and why Reform conversions are bogus. The principal of the school was happy with the help I extended him and he gave the booklet to the lawyers and the judge. The judge himself read the booklet and decided that the child was not Jewish according to Jewish law, certainly not according to the Vaad HaRabbanim of Holland, and therefore he did not belong in a Jewish school.

“The father was furious. He decided to appeal the decision in a higher court, where he spoke about the principles of equality and justice and protested that most of the children of his Reform friends attended that school and why should his son be excluded.

“His lawyers spoke eloquently about discrimination and what effect this could have on the child. The school’s side was confident because of its previous victory and did not

invest too much energy in the appeals process. The judges, who did not understand the nuances of the case, overturned the previous decision and said the child could attend the school. This entire episode was covered widely in the media. There was neither a newspaper nor a radio station that didn't have opinions on the matter.

"Due to my position on the Vaad HaRabbanim, I was very involved with this. When I saw that people on the street did not understand the case and thought we were discriminatory, I wrote some articles and gave them to a professor of medicine, a famous Jew, who published them in a major newspaper under his name. His article had a great impact. I also gave an article to a senior lecturer at the university in Amsterdam that surveyed the survival of the Jewish people over 2000 years and noted the damage that Reform perpetrates. This article, like the earlier one, made a big commotion and people began to realize that we were right.

"The school decided to bring the case to the Supreme Court of Holland. The problem is that you don't get to choose your own lawyer; they choose one for you. Who did they pick? A Jew who himself was married to a non-Jew! When we heard that, we weren't at all confident that we could explain to him the seriousness of the matter.

"Before the hearings began I visited 770 for the Kinus HaShluchim. When I passed by the Rebbe the Rebbe asked: "You're Vorst?" And he smiled broadly. It was clear that the Rebbe had not forgotten who I am and I felt that he was empowering me for the battle I was waging.

"The day of the court case there was much tension in the air. Fortunately, the judge cited the reasoning of the first judge and decided in our favor. We all breathed a sigh of relief. A different decision

could have created a serious problem and opened the door to assimilation.

"The end of the story is no less fascinating. The boy grew up and a few months ago I met him in Amsterdam. He asked me to sign on his conversion form since in Holland there is a regulation that whoever wants to convert needs the signatures of all the rabbanim in Holland. He did a true conversion and not long afterward he married a local Jew and they have a religious home."

HOW COULD MOSHIACH NOT HAVE COME ALREADY?

As in all European countries, there is a very large Moslem population who emigrated from Arab countries. They are about 6% of the population and they live mainly in the capitol and the suburbs, and that is what stirred up the controversy in the recent elections.

We asked R' Vorst about Jewish-Moslem relations and he surprised me with an unusual story:

"There was a time that I would travel to Rotterdam and give a shiur and then people would consult with me privately.

"One time, I saw two women in Arab Moroccan dress standing near the door. I asked what brought them to me and one of them said that she was married for years and did not have children. Growing up in Morocco, whenever someone in her family had a problem, they would speak to the Jewish Chacham and get a *kameia* (charm).

"I asked them why they didn't go to their imam and they laughed at that and asked me to write a *kameia*. I had never done so and I have no idea how to make one. I ended up writing the verse 'and Yaakov loved Rachel' on a paper. They thanked me profusely and left and I never saw them again."

R' Vorst said that in the decades that he has been living in Holland he never encountered anti-Semitism. There were stories here and there

that he heard, but it is definitely not as widespread as it is in other European countries.

"There are many people on the Left and many Arabs who oppose Israel. They are sure peace can be made but they don't want to make peace. Many of them get their information from the Arab media. The media displays agenda-driven pictures depicting the 'unfortunate' Arabs and that's where hatred towards Israel comes from, and for many of them – hatred towards Jews."

The Jewish revolution in Holland might be the second in size after France, on the European continent. Hundreds of baalei t'shuva have changed their lives over the past many decades and many others have begun keeping more of Jewish tradition. Shuls are full despite the many Jews who have made aliya in recent years. Aside from a few places in Amsterdam, the rabbanim throughout the country are shluchim of the Rebbe.

In accordance with the Rebbe's instruction at the Kinus HaShluchim in 5752, that the work now needs to be to prepare the world to welcome Moshiach, in Holland too they are talking a lot about the Geula and the anticipation of Moshiach's coming.

"Since the Rebbe began talking about Moshiach, the anticipation for Moshiach has once again become part of people's awareness. Decades ago, I was invited to speak at an event in honor of Shavuot. I spoke about the Geula and the coming of Moshiach. Years later I met a woman who had attended that event and she asked sadly: 'How can it be that Moshiach still did not come?'

"That is our work, to instill emuna and anticipation in the coming of Moshiach and at the same time to cry out to Hashem: Ad Masai? How can it be that Moshiach still did not come?"

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

By Aryeh Gotfryd, PhD

In honor of Seifer Shmos, literally the Book of Names, which we start to read soon, here are some thoughts about names and naming.

“As such, the Alm-ghty’s Geula is actually brought about through His emissary, the righteous Moshiach, with all eight names attributed to him. This includes also ‘His name is Menachem’ in a way that ‘One points with his finger and exclaims “Behold! Here is Menachem, our righteous Moshiach.”

*—Rosh Chodesh
Menachem Av, 5749*

The question has been asked for over four hundred years – Would a Rose by any other name not smell as sweet? And the answer has always been the same, until recently that is.

Scientists have noticed that society’s burgeoning obsession with individuality is spilling over into how we name our kids. So for example the name Rose, which was sweet enough for four of every thousand American girls born a hundred years ago, today tags less than a tenth as many.

And the same rising rarity of appellations affects not only the Rose’s of the world but also the

Lily’s and Violet’s and Hanna’s and Anna’s too. In the UK for example, the ten most popular names accounted for 85% of all names in 1800, about 45% in 1900 and about 20% today. In the US, a more non-conformist society, the total popularity of the top ten given names has plummeted from nearly 40% throughout the late 1800’s and first half of the 20th Century down to a mere 9% today.

What is driving this diversification? Some cite a rise in ethnic mobility. Others point to the internet. These factors surely contribute, but Jeane Twenge of San Diego University, author of *The Narcissism Epidemic*, has another theory. She says we are in love with ourselves and that we try to extend that self-centeredness to our children by crowning them with a name that’s unique or at least somewhat of a tweak.

But does it help? Do kids with designer names feel more special as a result? New-fangled names don’t have clear gender distinctions and research shows that boys that sport

girly sounding names are several times more likely to have behavioral problems as teenagers. Also kids tagged with odd spellings of common names tend to have delayed spelling and reading skills overall.

The naming game takes its toll on the parents as well. In a recent British study of 3,000 parents, one-in-five regretted the name they chose for a child, many of whom were distressed over the unusual or oddly spelled names they’d chosen. And even those who didn’t explicitly regret their name choice admitted there were names they knew now they wished they had chosen then.

We can contrast all this with the sub-culture that I’ve come to embrace – Chabad. Someone told me that one of his favorite pastimes is walking into a crowd of Lubavitchers and shouting “Mendy!” or “Mushkie!” just to see how many people turn around.

In general among orthodox Jews (and no doubt this applies as well to most groups with conservative cultural traditions), given names are not often innovative. Sephardim name after living relatives, Ashkenazim after the departed, Chassidim after their spiritual leaders, and all of them after Biblical personalities.

But however parochial and standardized the Judaic naming rituals seem to be, we don’t see anywhere near the degree of naming angst, neither on the part of the children nor by the parents. There is comfort, security and personal



empowerment that comes with the knowledge that you are named for a beloved ancestor or an exemplary human being, even if many of your peers have the same moniker.

Besides, as my wife the teacher tells me, not all Chaya Mushka's are called Mushkie. A class with 10 or more of them will parse into distinctive variants including Chaya, Chaiké, Chayaleh, Mushka, Mussie, Mushkaleh, Mushkie and Chaya Mushka and then start tagging on surname initials for Chaya C, Chaya D and so on.

There is another and even greater reason why traditional Jewish naming never leaves the parent (or child) fretting over coulda-shoulda-woulda issues and that is: According to tradition, Jewish parents are given a prophetic inspiration at the time of naming, whether it's a boy at his circumcision ceremony or a girl at a Torah reading following her birth.

The concept is that souls are created above together with their names. Parents typically think they have some good reason for naming their child as they do, whether it's theological, genealogical, or just plain logical. Together with that, however, is a Divine plan that this

soul really needs this name so the thought is "put" in the parents' minds.

How much second-guessing can you

do when you realize that the name wasn't up to you in the first place.

The process originates with Adam, whose own name in Hebrew hints at "adameh la'elyon – I shall be compared to the One Above." Genesis teaches that he called the animals by their names, i.e., their true names, the names through which they were created.

The Tanya, citing a teaching of the medieval kabbalist Rabbi Yitzhak Luria, teaches that everything that exists is formed through its own name, a specific Divine utterance that is unique to that particular item in that particular time and place. Referring to something by its true Hebrew name, i.e., by the Divine utterance that is its life source, reveals its true inner nature.

The author of the Tanya, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, in his last days on this world, lost sight of the physical properties of objects and started to relate visually to the elements of divine speech that sustained them.

While few of us experience life that way, renowned physicist John Archibald Wheeler once sent me a copy of his last major article "It From Bit." In it he speaks of the indivisible wholeness beyond space and time and how it relates to this world of plurality. He posits that the key factor is the bits of information that mediate the creative process, a cosmic process that is somehow managed by the observer, the

individual human being. This is highly

synergistic with the Torah's perspective on reality. "And G-d said... and there was..." "Blessed is He who spoke and the world came to be..." "Blessed are You... who brings all into existence through his Word." In short, there is Someone who provides information which in turn creates reality.

There is more to the name game than meets the eye.

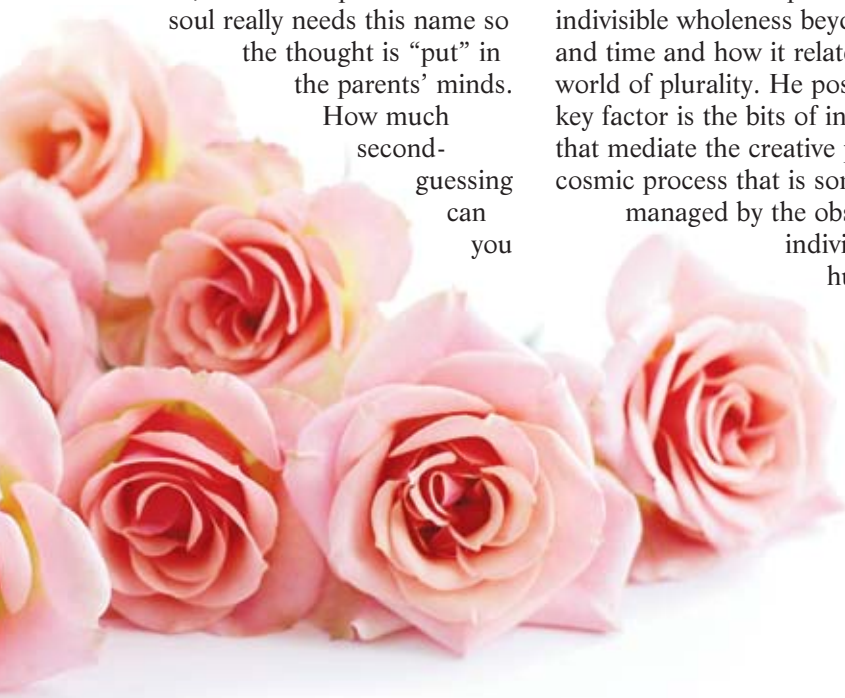
So far we have seen some flaws in modern secular trends in naming children and contrasted that with Torah ways. At the same time there is an upside. Individuals really are special and there really are no two things that are quite alike. The secular yearning for individuality can be seen as a positive yearning for the individual's special role in the grand scheme of things, a special role that only he can play. This too is synergistic with Torah.

One might argue that all this stems from a narcissistic egotism and that for sure is no good, but even here there is an upside. Chassidus teaches that the human ego, *yesh ha'nivra*, is rooted in the Divine Self, the *yesh amiti*. The reason why we feel ourselves to be truly independent beings is because we are created in the image of the One truly independent Being. Realizing this will help us on the road to *bittul*, to personal transformation.

Then we can stop trying to invent names we've never needed and return to our source, the original Code, the Torah, and find our place within that. And by attuning ourselves to the divine name within, we will reveal the truth in the world around us too.

And on that day, Hashem will be One and His Name will be One.

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CHAIM ELBAZ AND THE REBBE'S ANGELS

By Nosson Avrohom

Rabbi Chaim Elbaz is a prominent figure in national-religious circles in Afula and feels a strong connection to the Rebbe and with Chabad Chassidus.

Rabbi Chaim Elbaz, veteran educator in the biggest yeshiva-high school in Afula, rav of the Yehuda prep school for girls, and rav of the Maalot Nissim shul, doesn't seem at first glance to be connected to the Rebbe MH"M or consider himself to be a Chabad Chassid. But have a conversation with him on the subject of faith and he'll quickly direct it to the Rebbe and Chassidus. You'd be surprised to hear statements from him that wouldn't put to shame even old-time Chassidim.

"My outer appearance is not that of a Lubavitcher," he said to me, "but inside, a fire of love burns for the Rebbe's leadership, his ways, his paths and mainly for his teachings," he concludes enthusiastically. One of the seminal events that caused him to become such an ardent admirer is a scary story that had a miraculous ending, which he experienced when in Buenos Aires twelve years ago.

"Since then, whenever someone comes to consult with me and presents a problem or dilemma, I refer him to the Rebbe's Igros

Kodesh and tell him to write a letter. That's a sure way to work things out."

R' Elbaz's initial encounter with Chabad was back when he was a boy and a student in yeshivas Kfar HaRoeh. He was a student of the students of Rav Neria, who was a tremendous admirer of the Rebbe and the one who brought Yud-Tes Kislev farbrengens into the yeshiva-high schools.

"I attended shiurim that took place in his home. I was only fifteen but I remember that he would speak a lot about the Rebbe's greatness. Every year on Yud-Tes Kislev he would hold a farbrengen, during the course of which he would read a letter that he received from the Rebbe."

R' Elbaz remembers Shabbasos when Lubavitcher bachurim would come to yeshiva and R' Neria would encourage the boys to listen to what they had to say and to learn with them.

"He would tell us, 'There is a lot to learn from them,' and that is when the first seeds were planted of the awareness that Chabad Chassidus is a special movement.

"Those seeds turned into fruit over a decade ago, when I had the opportunity to take my family on shlichus for the Jewish Agency and to run the Yesod HaDas community in Buenos Aires, and work with young people under the auspices of B'nei Akiva.

"On the one hand, the idea was appealing because I was taught to value shlichus and giving. On the other hand, it was no simple matter to take my family, which included a number of small children, and leave our familiar environment and get used to a new country and new language.

"As I was still deliberating, we were guests of my mother-in-law who lives in Tzfas. In the evening I went to daven Maariv in the Chabad shul. That's when I decided to write to the Rebbe. I had learned about writing to the Rebbe through the Igros Kodesh from the Segal brothers who live in Afula on shlichus. I won't deny that there was an element of curiosity involved. I wanted to see if this really 'works.'

"Hardly a day passes that I don't regret not having kept the answer that I opened to. In the long detailed letter, the Rebbe explains the advantage of shlichus and concludes



Rabbi Chaim Elbaz in the Maalot Nissim shul

with, ‘May the verse, “He commands His angels to watch over you in all your ways,” be fulfilled in you.’

“I was in the clouds. I was so excited that it’s hard to describe in words. After davening I rushed back to my mother-in-law’s house and said to my wife, ‘The Rebbe wants us to go! We’re going!’ She didn’t understand where this sudden resolve came from after weeks of indecision until I shared the letter with her.”

From that point until he left, R’ Elbaz socialized with the Chabad community and was ecstatic.

“I often attended Tanya classes given by R’ Goldberg who came from Migdal HaEmek. I also was involved in conversations with the Segals. They opened my eyes to the depth of Chabad Chassidus. Another person who had a great influence on me was R’ Chaim Sasson of Beitar Ilit, who I met at an educational Shabbaton in Shlomi where he was one of the speakers. Aside from the official lectures, we spoke and I discovered a Chabad Chassid who is a walking encyclopedia.

“We spoke for hours into the night about belief and knowledge, about Geula and the identity of Moshiach. He explained to me in detail the basis for the faith that Lubavitchers have in the Rebbe as Moshiach and I found this to be an

“My outer appearance is not that of a Lubavitcher,” he said to me, “but inside, a fire of love burns for the Rebbe’s leadership, his ways, his paths and mainly for his teachings.”

approach with a solid basis and not just a whim. You can say I fell in love with Chabad Chassidus and the Rebbe. Each morning, I go to daven Shacharis in the Chabad shul in my city. Even though I daven Nusach Sefard and they daven Nusach Arizal, I can’t miss a t’filla there. The warmth and the atmosphere in the shul are special.”

R’ Elbaz lived in Argentina for three years, in the course of which he learned Spanish, got involved in the community and accomplished a lot with the youth to strengthen their Jewish identity.

“About two weeks before the end of my shlichus and my return to Israel, I decided that I wanted to compensate my children for the great difficulties they experienced, especially in the beginning. I decided to fly with them to Disneyland, the dream of every boy and girl.

“In order to fly to the US, I had to get a visa so one morning I went to the American embassy. When it was my turn I went over the clerk

and asked for a visa for a week’s stay in the US, but he refused to believe me and even mocked me. ‘I know you Jews. You ask for a visa for a week and you end up staying in our country.’ I left the embassy feeling embarrassed.

“The first thing I did was contact a Lubavitcher who has a radio program with a large listening audience. I told him my story and he publicized it but that didn’t help. I decided to write to the Rebbe.

“I quickly contacted Rabbi Tawil, a Lubavitcher in Buenos Aires, who has since settled in Eretz Yisroel. I told him my story and told him I wanted to go to his house and write to the Rebbe. He was happy to have me and together we wrote to the Rebbe and put the letter, at random, into a volume of Igros Kodesh. When I began reading the letter I was thrilled. The Rebbe wrote that the person would see miracles and wonders in his work, miracles above the natural order of things.

“After a bracha like that I was

sure things would work out and we would get the visas to the US. How would it happen? We would wait and see.

“Two days went by and the Rebbe’s answer was no longer at the forefront of my mind. I was busy arranging a summer camp for boys while simultaneously getting ready to leave the country. The place we chose to take all the boys we worked with was a special campsite located about 400 kilometers from Buenos Aires.

“After two days packed with activities, we got in our car and the kids got on the bus and we set out. I had driven about 250 kilometers when I was informed by one of the counselors who had been on the bus that an accident had occurred. I was terribly frightened by this news.

“Here I’d like to mention that after my brother was killed in a car accident, I am particularly shaken by car accidents and anything like it brings back the terrible memories of that time. I turned around and stepped on the gas. I couldn’t believe this was happening at the conclusion of my shlichus.

“When I arrived at the location of the accident, I quickly got out of my car and saw all the counselors coming towards me, singing and dancing, ‘HaRebbi Shlita, Melech HaMoshiach, Ein Kamocha BaOlam, Yechi Adoneinu ...,’ over and over.

“I looked around for the bus and saw it overturned in a ditch on the side of the road.

“‘What happened to the bus?’ I screamed. ‘Is everybody alive?’

“The counselors ignored my frantic questions, engrossed in their song.

“‘Why are you singing?’ I shrieked.

“That’s what you taught us,” they chorused.

“It took a few minutes until they got around to reassuring me that everybody was fine, without even so

much as a scratch. One of the counselors asked me to come over to the local highway superintendent who wanted to talk to me. He said to me, ‘Listen here rabbi, today I became convinced that you are really G-d’s children. With my own eyes I saw how a bus fell and turned over and over and then everybody got out without even a scratch. It makes absolutely no sense.’

“He said that he was the superintendent of this highway for fifteen years and had witnessed some serious accidents. ‘In an accident like this there normally would be several dead. Your G-d watched over you,’ he concluded in amazement.

“As he was exclaiming over the greatness of G-d, it clicked! Just two days earlier I had written to the Rebbe that I wanted visas to the US and the Rebbe answered **that there would be miracles and wonders**. I assumed it referred to what I was asking about, but the Rebbe had ‘preceded the blow with the cure’ and had blessed the boys with miracles and nobody was hurt.

“I immediately told the guys and this time I, too, joined in the singing and dancing.”

Since that miracle in 5757, R’ Elbaz has become an ardent Chassid. He writes to the Rebbe about whatever comes up and recommends that all his friends and acquaintances do the same when they need advice and a bracha. He excitedly told me about a miracle his mother recently experienced.

“My mother spent a long time in Colombia, where she underwent a successful kidney transplant. When we in the family realized that she must have this transplant in order to survive – the doctors recommended this place where they do it with the maximum speed and effectiveness – I wrote to the Rebbe.

“The Rebbe’s answer was clear.

It had to do with a bracha to someone who asked for a bracha for health and the Rebbe advised him to consult with two doctors and encouraged him not to worry. I was excited about this answer. In general, whenever I write I open to clear answers. Of course we did as the Rebbe said and after a series of tests and the medical evaluation of her condition in Israel, we left for Colombia last Tishrei. My brother was the first to go and stay with our mother. The night of Hoshana Raba I took a flight to Colombia via Madrid and of course I took along my *dalet minim*.

“My friends and family told me that in Madrid they would throw out the dalet minim but I insisted on taking them anyway. I hoped to meet a Jew who hadn’t said the bracha yet and I would enable him to do so.

“When I arrived in Madrid, one of the inspectors asked to see the plants I was holding and then he told me to throw them out. I asked him what he would think if I asked him to throw his god in the garbage. He was very offended, and when he saw that I wasn’t going to obey him he called for his supervisor, who came and angrily ordered me to throw it out.

“I explained to him – to the extent that I could explain the dalet minim to a non-Jew – that this is a very important Jewish practice and I was not allowed to dispose of them. He listened and was convinced to allow me to continue traveling with my minim.

“After a number of hours of wearying flight I arrived in Bogota, where I was supposed to take a flight to the city of Medellin. Unfortunately (or so I thought), the line waiting at passport control was long – so long, in fact, that I missed my connecting flight. The next flight would be leaving in three hours. I was exhausted. I calmed myself with the thought that this was all for the

best and called my brother to inform him of the slight change in plans and that I would be arriving three hours late.

“My remaining strength dissipated in the efforts to get another ticket. I finally boarded the plane and when we landed, my brother greeted me at the terminal. ‘Chaim,’ he said, ‘it’s great that you brought the dalet minim with you. You won’t believe what a surprise is waiting for you.’ He went outside and called over a man who was standing in the corner. When the man saw me holding the dalet minim he began sobbing.

“I asked him why he was crying and he told me that this was the first time in his life that he would be doing this mitzva. He had recently become aware of his Jewishness and he was trying to start living a life of Torah and mitzvos to whatever extent was possible. When Sukkos began he didn’t know how to order a set of dalet minim where he lived, and now, here he was at just the right time and place/ When he saw my brother, who had come to pick me up, he was excited to meet a Jew who wore a kippa and he got into a conversation with him, but he was completely overcome when he heard that I would be arriving soon and that I had dalet minim.

“For the first time I saw what a Jewish neshama looks like when it is inspired to seek G-dliness.”

R’ Elbaz realized what motivated him to insist on keeping his minim in Madrid and why he hadn’t listened to his friends who told him that they would order him to throw it out. He also realized why he had been delayed for three hours in Bogota. It was all in order for him to meet this man and enable him to do the mitzva.

“My mother was in the hospital for two months until a donor was found. The transplant worked out with open miracles. Even the medical team had to admit to that.



Rabbi Chaim Elbaz with his students

This is a generation that is seeking the neshama, the depth and inner beauty of Judaism, and if we don’t succeed in giving it to them, they won’t end up with Torah at all.

As we waited, we were able to inspire some other souls who were also waiting for a transplant. We set up a shiur and so all the waiting turned into a shlichus.”

In recent years there is a tremendous interest in Chassidus within religious-Zionist circles.

“You can’t deny this phenomenon. I’ve been complaining for a long time now to the roshei yeshivos in our circles that there are many talmidim that we are not servicing. We give them intellectual material and more intellectual material and nothing comes of it, while Chassidus provides the depth of Torah. Daily, more people are coming to Chassidus and aren’t just doing mitzvos out of rote behavior but with enthusiasm, proud of being

Jewish.

“I’m seeing many people in the religious-Zionist sector interested in Chabad Chassidus and this is the main reason. Chabad sheds light on Torah and mitzvos in a way that we never had before. A talmid can learn poskim, Rishonim, Acharonim and develop tremendous Torah understanding but ultimately, he will be lacking in the light of the neshama. This is a generation that is seeking the neshama, the depth and inner beauty of Judaism, and if we don’t succeed in giving it to them, they won’t end up with Torah at all.

“In my soul I am a Chabad Chassid. I learned by Rav Neria and that was his chinuch – that we must learn Chabad Chassidus. If you go around the classrooms in our yeshiva-high school, you will see a picture of the Rebbe in every room.”

IN THE LINE OF FIRE

By Nosson Avraham

Translated by Michael Leib Dobry

“The Carmel fire tragedy is the worst in the history of Israel”. This refers to the huge inferno that broke out on the first day of Chanukah, raged for five days, resulted in the deaths of forty-two people, destroyed hundreds of thousands of trees, and decimated thousands of acres of green fields. Here we include first-hand reports from shluchim throughout the region.

WHO BY FIRE AND WHO BY WATER

On the morning of the first day of Chanukah, it looked just like any other little wildfire that local fire and rescue forces are often called upon to control and extinguish. But just a few hours later, it became obvious that this could prove to be the biggest and most catastrophic fire disaster known to Eretz Yisroel. Long months without rain, dry trees and plant life, and fierce southeasterly winds all joined together to magnify a bonfire lit by two youths in an illegal garbage heap located in the Druze village of Isfiya. Menacing flames spread at the rapid speed of nearly forty-five miles an hour, leaping over treetops and

ferociously devouring everything that stood in their path.

The gravity of the situation came into even sharper focus by early afternoon as a bus filled with cadets from a prison officers training course made its way to evacuate Damon Prison, where the raging blaze was threatening to engulf the area. The bus set out from Ramle, and on the highway between the Carmel Forest Spa Resort Hotel and Kibbutz Beit Oren, it suddenly became caught in a whirlwind of flames. Within minutes, the highway was transformed into one all-consuming firetrap.

“You are witnesses to the biggest conflagration we have ever known, staggering in scope both regarding

the ability to contend with it and the number of people killed,” explained Mr. Chezi Levy, spokesman for the Haifa Fire Department, later that night.

The bus driver only saw smoke and flames before him, and he veered the bus to the side in an effort to turn around, but instead he collided with a tree and was injured. The fire quickly sprang forward from the grove area in the direction of the highway, caught up with the bus, and in a matter of moments, the flames ignited the fuel tank and incinerated the bus into ashes. There was no chance to escape.

“People tried to save themselves, but they were burned alive,” said





Rabbi Yehuda Dunin giving out jelly donuts to firemen on their way to putting out another blaze



A Chabad House vehicle with a mobile menorah on activities with the firefighters near the burning remains of the bus in which forty prison guards were killed

Hadera firefighter Dudu Vanunu. Two police vehicles were traveling a short distance behind them and they too drove into the firetrap. With some difficulty, they managed to extricate themselves from the flames, and their occupants are currently hospitalized in serious condition, fighting for their lives. Forty-two others were not as fortunate and perished in the inferno.

Several long minutes passed until the rescue and ambulance crews managed to reach the scene. It turned

out that none of the victims had any chance of surviving the fiery destruction. During those moments, it had already become clear to government officials, the police, the military, and the fire department that this was a tragedy of national proportion. The domestic forces in Eretz Yisroel could not deal with the situation alone.

The great fire continued to consume thousands of acres of trees and groves in the Carmel forests.

Hundreds of homes on Kibbutz Beit Oren were completely destroyed; tens of thousands of residents were evacuated from Beit Oren, Ein Hod, Tirat HaCarmel, Chursha, Nir Etzion, Megadim, Kfar Sitrin, and even Haifa's Dania neighborhood.

On that Shabbos and Sunday, dozens of fire-fighting aircraft arrived from Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Turkey, Spain, and Russia and joined the hectic efforts to extinguish the blaze. But the fire

Kibbutz Beit Oren was being evacuated, as most of its homes had already gone up in flames. We ran to the bakery, ordered thousands of donuts, and headed for the region. Things were in a state of total chaos.

apparently refused to die out. It continued to run wild along the western slopes of the Carmel, including on Kibbutz Beit Oren. "The fire is spreading from place to place, and it's unknown when it will be done," said the chief fire commissioner on Sunday morning, three days after the blaze had broken out, testimony to its great intensity.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu accepted responsibility for heading the forces trying to put out the spreading inferno. "We are harnessing the services of the entire country to deal with the tragedy, rescue those still entrapped, and control the fire. I spoke with the Minister of Defense, who will prepare the entire Israel Defense Forces to assist in evacuating local residents and controlling the blaze. The forces have operated in an exemplary manner with strength, dedication, duty, and their work is still ahead of them."

THE CARMEL CHABAD HOUSE IN A WIDE RANGE OF ACTIVITIES

As soon as word of the fire became known, the Carmel Chabad House itself, run by Rabbi **Yehuda Dunin**, opened a command center to plan out details on how to increase the light of the Chanukah holiday.

Rabbi Dunin realized that he can't control all the activities by himself, and he joined forces with additional shluchim from other neighborhoods in Haifa: R' Ohad Antverg, R' Yossi

Rosenberg, Rabbi Uri Lemberg, and T'mimim from the local branch of Yeshivas Tomchei T'mimim, administered by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Wilschanski. They came out to the field immediately with a supply of cold drinks, jelly donuts, and menorahs. The crews spread out among the rescue forces until the onset of Shabbos, when another crew headed by HaTamim Tanchum Rivkin, remained to spend Shabbos there and arrange for davening and Kiddush. The fire and rescue commanders in the field expressed their deep and heartfelt appreciation.

The first places to be evacuated were the University of Haifa and the streets near the Carmel forest in the Dania neighborhood. Since that Thursday, it has been virtually impossible to get a hold of the regional shliach, Rabbi Yehuda Dunin. He has been working constantly and his eyes are bleary from lack of sleep, but he had been directing all his energy these days towards encouraging local residents and his round-the-clock activities with the rescue forces, as with the members of the media who have placed their crews in the courtyard of the evacuated university. "I'm on my way to the university now," says Rabbi Yehuda Dunin. "T'mimim stayed there all Shabbos long and maintained nonstop activities."

FIGHTING FIRE WITH FIRE

In a conversation that we held

shortly after the conclusion of Shabbos, we also spoke with Rabbi Dunin's assistant, HaTamim Tanchum Rivkin, who also stayed for Shabbos near the front-line tactical headquarters set up by each of the relevant bodies: Magen David Adom, the Fire Department, Israel Police, the Israel Defense Forces, the Jewish National Fund, the Municipality of Haifa, the Israel Air Force, and an additional arm designed to coordinate joint activities. Thousands of people are located in the region, and the Chanukah activities not only weren't curtailed, they were intensified manifold. "On Friday afternoon and Motzaei Shabbos, we lit hundreds of menorahs, and we organized Kabbalas Shabbos services on Friday night."

Rabbi Dunin talks about the lack of opposition. On the contrary, as long as regular citizens were not allowed to enter the front-line tactical headquarters, the shluchim did it for them. People understood the tremendous value of Chabad activities during such difficult times as a means of emotional encouragement. "We gave out hundreds of kippot at the site. Even the most cynical among them, i.e., those in the print and electronic media, responded to the call to put on t'fillin. There was a spiritual feeling in the atmosphere. Israel Police commissioner Dudu Cohen participated in the Kiddush that we held on Friday night. He delayed his briefing until we finished, and then he thanked us warmly. We're talking about a tremendous *kiddush Hashem*."

There were also foreign media correspondents on the scene, showing equal amazement and asking questions. "We couldn't be interviewed on Shabbos, and our Jewish colleagues explained to them that replies to questions would come on Motzaei Shabbos. In praise in the firefighters, it must be said that they toiled with great determination in

putting out the fire, despite working for many hours without sleep. Every fireman whom we approached had just one request: pray for rain. 'A powerful rain can curb the rampaging blaze that seems to taunt the firefighters.'

In cooperation with the social services department of the Municipality of Haifa, the Chabad House cared for the evacuees, primarily students from the university dormitories, and arranged accommodations with host families. Similarly, they made certain to visit and cheer people staying temporarily at one of the local public schools. "The fire overtook me on Thursday afternoon," Rabbi Dunin told "Beis Moshiach" as he took a look back at those moments when he understood the magnitude of the disaster and how Chanukah campaign activities were about to take on a very serious face. "We were at the central menorah lightings at the Chorev Center, when we started receiving phone calls from every direction. People were in a panic. They realized that this was a serious blaze and it was quickly moving towards Haifa.

"In the meantime, we heard that Kibbutz Beit Oren was being evacuated, as most of its homes had already gone up in flames. We ran to the bakery, ordered thousands of donuts, and headed for the region. Things were in a state of total chaos. We met with many prison service officials, who were under pressure to evacuate Damon Prison, where the fire had already reached.

"One of the officers excitedly told me, 'You always pop up, I don't always know from where, but you're everywhere...' I met a woman whose home had been completely destroyed. When she saw me, she said, 'You know when to come. You're the only ones who are there during the most difficult times to bring the light...' We lifted her spirits, giving her encouragement based upon the well-known saying about wealth that



In a Magen David Adom command center

comes after a fire.

"Friday was incredibly hectic. Portions of the Dania neighborhood had been evacuated, and together with our activities among the defense forces, we also took care of the evacuated students who had no place to go. When the dormitories were vacated, many came to us at the Chabad House, which was open around the clock. We also visited those who had been evacuated by the Haifa Municipality and gave them moral support. People were still in a state of shock. They hadn't fully absorbed the intensity of the fire's destructive power and the damage it had caused. We planned to act with even greater fortitude and 'shturem' in order to bring the light of Chanukah to every single Jew."

THE SHLUCHIM IN TIRAT HA'CARMEL ARE EVACUATED AND GET TO WORK

This unbelievable inferno drove more than five thousand residents of Tirat HaCarmel from their homes. At a certain stage, the fire had spread in the direction of the city, coming within a few yards of the town's outskirts. While this was happening, the local shliach of the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach, Rabbi **Yechezkel Markowitz**, told us about what was going on in his city during the height of Chanukah campaign activities:

"About three hours ago, we

received instructions from the police that we must leave Tirat HaCarmel, due to the concern that the fire would reach the city's neighborhoods. The security forces evacuated several thousand people to a more secure location, where we organized Chanukah lighting ceremonies with those residents compelled to escape from their homes.

"At the moment, we are on our way home," said Rabbi Markowitz on Thursday night. "We learned that the fire had stopped just a few yards away from our house. The Chabad House is prepared to assist according to the need, and it will be open to any request for help from local residents. We are working in cooperation with the municipality and the security forces, in the event that people require our assistance. We continue with a great *shturem* to spread the light of Yiddishkait and the Chanukah holiday, even in this miserable state of affairs."

A few hours after the first conversation, Rabbi Markowitz already sounded different. The police had rescued thousands of residents from their homes, but they would not allow them to return until Sunday night. The feeling and the atmosphere were similar to times of war.

On Motzaei Shabbos, we caught up with Rabbi Markowitz's son and right-hand man on shlichus, R' **Yosef Yitzchak**. He had just given an

I was on Chanukah campaign activities in the center of town, when I suddenly received a call that the fire was rapidly approaching the house, and I had to quickly come home and pack. Everyone was in a panic.

interview on the Voice of Israel's Reshet Bet radio network, during which he was asked to discuss Chabad House activities and the overall atmosphere in the city. He laid out before us those moments of fear, the uncertainty, and the huge wave of activities the Chabad House was planning to do – and was already doing – ever since the extent of the tragedy had been made known. “My parents’ house is the second closest to the forest. I was on Chanukah campaign activities in the center of town, when I suddenly received a call that the fire was rapidly approaching the house, and I had to quickly come home and pack. Everyone was in a panic.

“With no alternative under the circumstances, we sent the bachurim back to the yeshiva in Haifa and headed back towards our neighborhood. When we got there, the sight before me was one that I’ll never forget. The streets leading to the neighborhood were completely crammed with outbound traffic. It looked like a vast stream of refugees, and everyone was in a terrible rush. Since I saw that it would be impossible to bring my car into town, I parked it on a side street and sped towards my parents’ home on foot. I helped them collect the t’fillin and several other items of special value, and we quickly walked back to my car. From there, we traveled to the Chabad House to continue our activities.

“On our way back, my wife called and informed me that the police

vehicles were new cruising our neighborhood, announcing that we all had to abandon our homes. My plans shot, I turned back towards the house, where we gathered a few things and shut off the gas. In the midst of our hurried efforts to pack some belongings, the electricity was cut off and I was forced to fumble around in the dark to find the more important items I wanted to take. I drove back to the Chabad House, and considered whether to remove the Torah scrolls. Throughout the city, we could see the dreadful flames rising to tremendous heights. The entire horizon was colored in shades of reddish black, and all fears were justified.

“Later that night, when we saw the city was turning into a ghost town, I decided to send the women and children to Kfar Chabad, while the rest of us stayed to help community members who were still trying to leave the city.”

Before making his hasty departure, Rabbi Markowitz met with the deputy police commander, a Chabad supporter, who said that he was taking his Shabbos clothes with him. This statement merely sharpened the seriousness of the situation. It turned out that the fire had become so large that it would clearly continue burning on Shabbos. “When we realized in the wee hours of that morning that even remaining in the Chabad House had become too dangerous, we decided to leave as well and join our family in Kfar Chabad. At the entrance to the city,

we saw numerous police and fire-fighting units streaming in. We effectively utilized our time by lighting Chanukah candles with them and uplifting their spirits.”

It was only after a long and nerve-wracking hour that we learned that the blaze had been put under control at the last minute, thanks to the tireless efforts of firefighters. “We lit the Chanukah lights at 2:00 am as it was impossible to do so before the evacuation. At 4:00 am, we had to return to the Chabad House as the police suddenly advised us that the fire had started again with full force, and anyone remaining in the nearby neighborhoods was in immediate danger. Throughout this time, we heard the firefighting planes circling overhead and the mobile fire department units that entered the city.”

On Friday morning, numerous local residents arrived at the Chabad House in request of spiritual and material assistance. Stores were closed, people were stuck without infant formulas for their children, and the Chabad House was the address for all such matters. “It all reminded older people who have seen a thing or two in their lifetimes of scenes from the Second World War and other conflicts. Throughout Friday, we sent vehicles of Chabad activists to help evacuate residents who were unable to leave on their own. Just a few hours before Shabbos began, when the local authorities determined that it would not be possible to spend Shabbos in the city, we made our plans to travel to Kfar Chabad.”

By Motzaei Shabbos, the Markowitz family had already returned to Tirat HaCarmel to provide assistance to all those in need. Rabbi Markowitz declared with resolve that not only would outreach activities continue, they would even intensify. We conquer darkness through light, and we must not submit to it. “On Sunday evening, we

are arranging a large array of activities for young people with Rabbi Tuvia Bolton. This will include rallies for children, central Chanukah lighting ceremonies, and we now will add humanitarian activities. We have called upon everyone to assist us in these efforts.”

EVACUATING YESHIVAS ‘OHR AVNER’ IN KFAR SITRIN

Not far from Mt. Carmel is Kfar Sitrin, which was also evacuated, as were several other settlements due to the approaching fire. This village is home to the two hundred and fifty students of Yeshivas “Ohr Avner”, most of whom are immigrants from the former Soviet Union, along with another forty families of Anash staff members, who do everything possible to bring these students and other youths closer to Yiddishkait and chassidus, and to provide them with all they require both materially and spiritually. Rabbi **Michael Dor**, director-general at Kfar Sitrin, spoke in a media interview about the evacuation of Kfar Sitrin.

“During the afternoon hours, when I saw that the fire continued to move forward and spread unrelentingly, I checked to see whether we had to evacuate. As a result, I consulted with the security officer of the Carmel Coast Regional Council. He said that the fire was still far enough away, and we could stay for the time being. That evening, he called to inform me that the fire was getting closer and we should prepare to evacuate. I was therefore compelled to tell all the families and students about a quick and speedy evacuation.”

Rabbi Dor got a number of vans and buses together, making certain to arrange an orderly and safe departure. Some of the students were escorted to their homes by counselors, while those without family in Eretz Yisroel were



Kfar Sitrin. The flames reached the fences.

transferred to the Shorashim vacation village, where staff members also arrived.

“It seemed all so frightening, like an atom bomb or a tornado had hit,” yeshiva counselor Rabbi **Mordechai Amor** told “Beis Moshiach”. “When I was still on my way to the yeshiva from Zichron Yaakov, I saw the rising thick smoke. At first, we thought that it was a raincloud. By four o’clock in the afternoon, it was decided to evacuate the students. The counselors began to organize the students according to emergency procedures, arranged their luggage, and assembled in the dining hall. At seven o’clock, all the buses were already in place.” Within half an hour, the buses were filled, and once we had determined that all the students had boarded, the order went out to move. In addition, the administration contacted the parents of the students from the former Soviet Union to reassure them and let them know where their sons were now located.

“After evacuating the children and the staff families, I returned with several staff members to remove the Torah scrolls. Suddenly, we were officially informed that we were less than a mile from the spreading inferno and now officially in the line of the fire, and therefore, we must abandon the premises. From that moment on, the kibbutz was declared a closed area and all entry was denied. After personally determining

that everyone had departed, I was the last one to leave Kfar Sitrin. Now, after matters have calmed down, I am happy and thankful to Alm-ghty G-d that everyone had been evacuated without any unnecessary panic, despite the fact that the evacuation was not emotionally easy for any of us.

“For the students, this virtually constituted being separated from their home, no less. On Friday morning, the Kfar Sitrin administration anticipated some real drama, as the fire approached and even reached the village gates. They called out the fire department, which brought in a bulldozer to dig a canal around the village. It was only as a result of an actual miracle that the wind shifted at the last moment.”

CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM

By the time the Hebrew version of this article went to press, on the fifth day of Chanukah, the flames had already been extinguished, but the fire department continued to operate on a level of high alert. During the weekend, fire-fighting planes arrived in Eretz Yisroel, among them the largest in the world with a capacity of more than twenty-one thousand gallons of water. The following Sunday evening, the firefighters continued to battle the flames from the ground that had spread to various locations.